



(12) **United States Patent**
Kizhakkepat et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 10,507,912 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 17, 2019**

(54) **INBOARD BEARING ASSEMBLIES WITH IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY**

(71) Applicant: **Bell Helicopter Textron Inc.**, Fort Worth, TX (US)

(72) Inventors: **Amarjit Olenchery Kizhakkepat**, Fort Worth, TX (US); **Michael Christopher Burnett**, Fort Worth, TX (US); **Michael Dean Dearman**, Weatherford, TX (US)

(73) Assignee: **Bell Textron Inc.**, Fort Worth, TX (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 47 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **15/990,622**

(22) Filed: **May 26, 2018**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**
US 2019/0016455 A1 Jan. 17, 2019

Related U.S. Application Data
(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 15/648,650, filed on Jul. 13, 2017.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
B64C 27/35 (2006.01)
B64C 29/00 (2006.01)
B64C 11/06 (2006.01)
F16C 33/06 (2006.01)
F16C 17/10 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **B64C 29/0033** (2013.01); **B64C 11/06** (2013.01); **F16C 17/10** (2013.01); **F16C 33/06** (2013.01); **F16C 2326/43** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC B64C 27/35; B64C 27/54; B64C 27/51
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

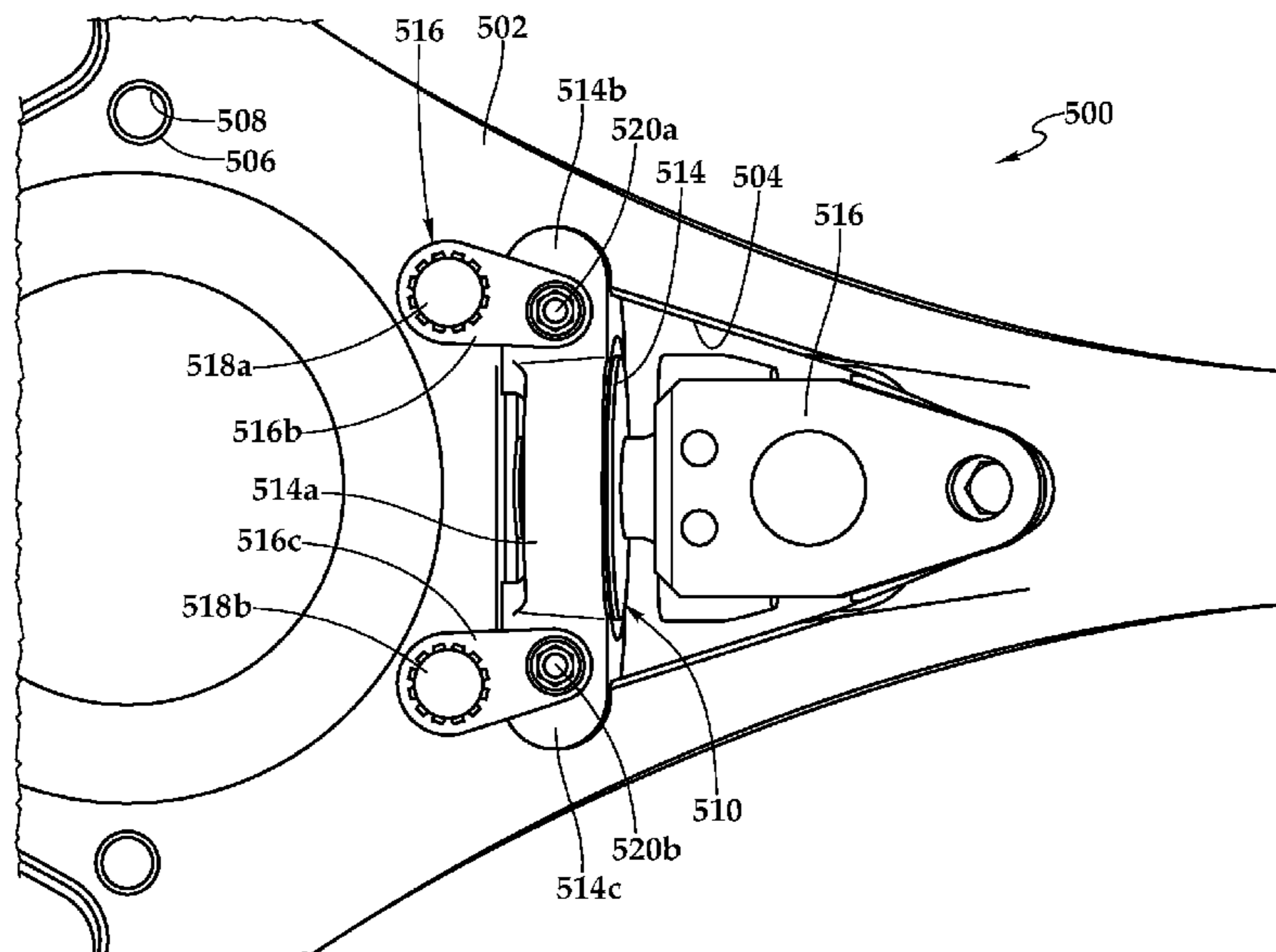
4,028,002 A *	6/1977	Finney	B64C 27/35 416/134 A
4,257,739 A *	3/1981	Covington	B64C 27/35 416/134 A
4,430,045 A *	2/1984	Cresap	B64C 27/001 244/17.27
5,186,686 A	2/1993	Staples et al.	
5,316,442 A *	5/1994	Mouille	B64C 27/35 416/134 A

(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Brian M O'Hara
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Lawrence Youst PLLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**
A proprotor system for a tiltrotor aircraft includes a yoke having a plurality of blade arms each having an inboard pocket. Each of a plurality of bearing assemblies is disposed at least partially within one of the inboard pockets. Each of a plurality of inboard beams is disposed at least partially between a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing of each bearing assembly and has a proprotor blade coupled thereto. Each of a plurality of latch assemblies selectively couples one of the bearing assemblies to the yoke. Each latch assembly is rotatable relative to the yoke between an engaged position wherein the latch assembly is engagable with one of the bearing assemblies to couple the bearing assembly to the yoke and a disengaged position wherein the latch assembly is disengaged from the respective bearing assembly enabling installation and removal of the respective bearing assembly relative to the respective pocket.

20 Claims, 19 Drawing Sheets



(56)

References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

5,601,408	A	2/1997	Hunter et al.	
5,620,305	A	4/1997	McArdle	
6,007,298	A	12/1999	Karem	
6,296,444	B1	10/2001	Schellhase et al.	
6,641,365	B2	11/2003	Karem	
8,226,355	B2	7/2012	Stamps et al.	
8,231,346	B2 *	7/2012	Stamps	F16F 1/40 416/134 A
9,090,344	B2 *	7/2015	Stucki	B64C 27/48
9,126,680	B2	9/2015	Stamps et al.	
9,254,915	B2	2/2016	Stamps	
9,656,747	B2 *	5/2017	Shundo	B64C 11/02
2013/0105637	A1	5/2013	Stamps et al.	
2014/0248150	A1	9/2014	Sutton et al.	

* cited by examiner

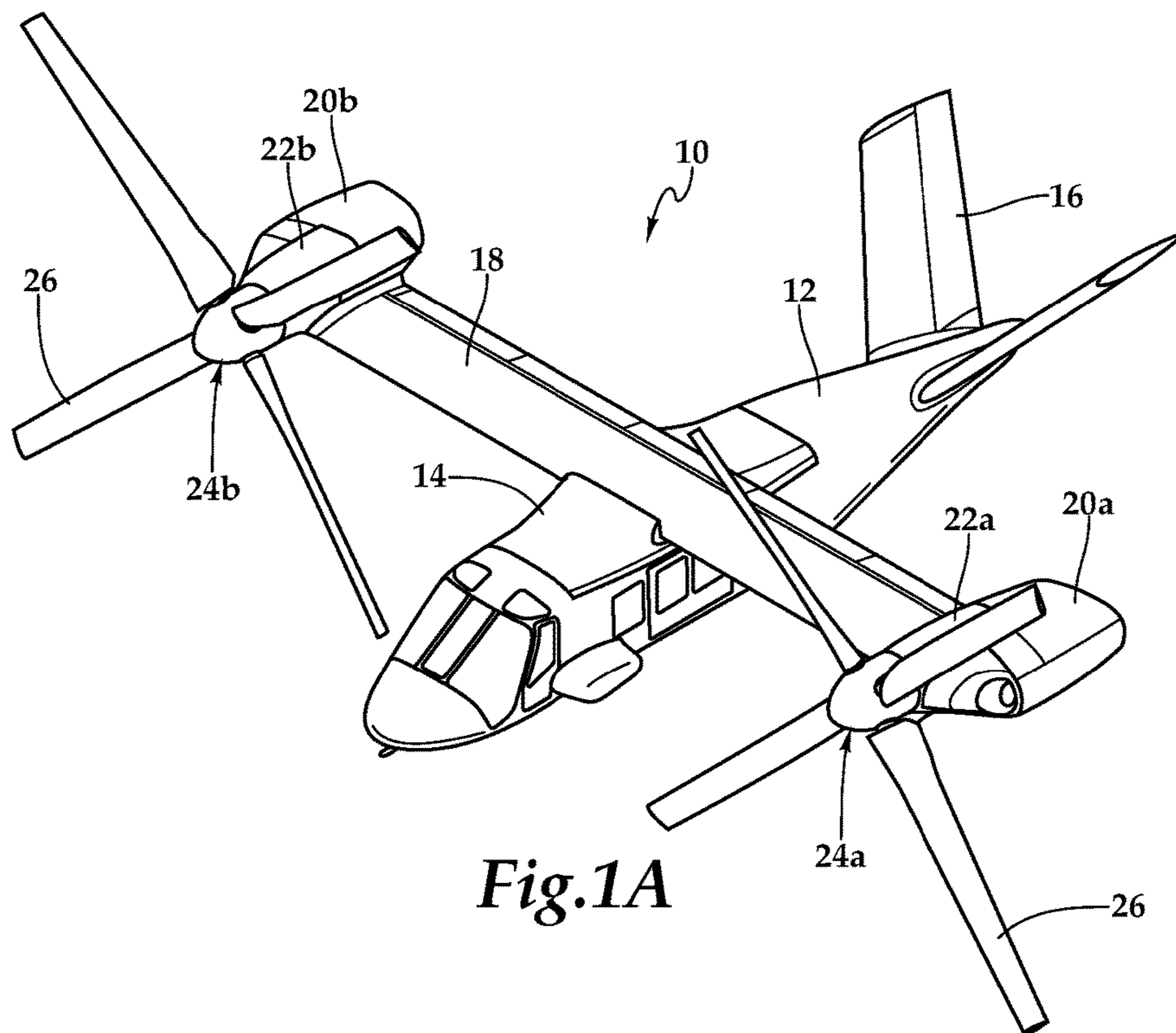


Fig.1A

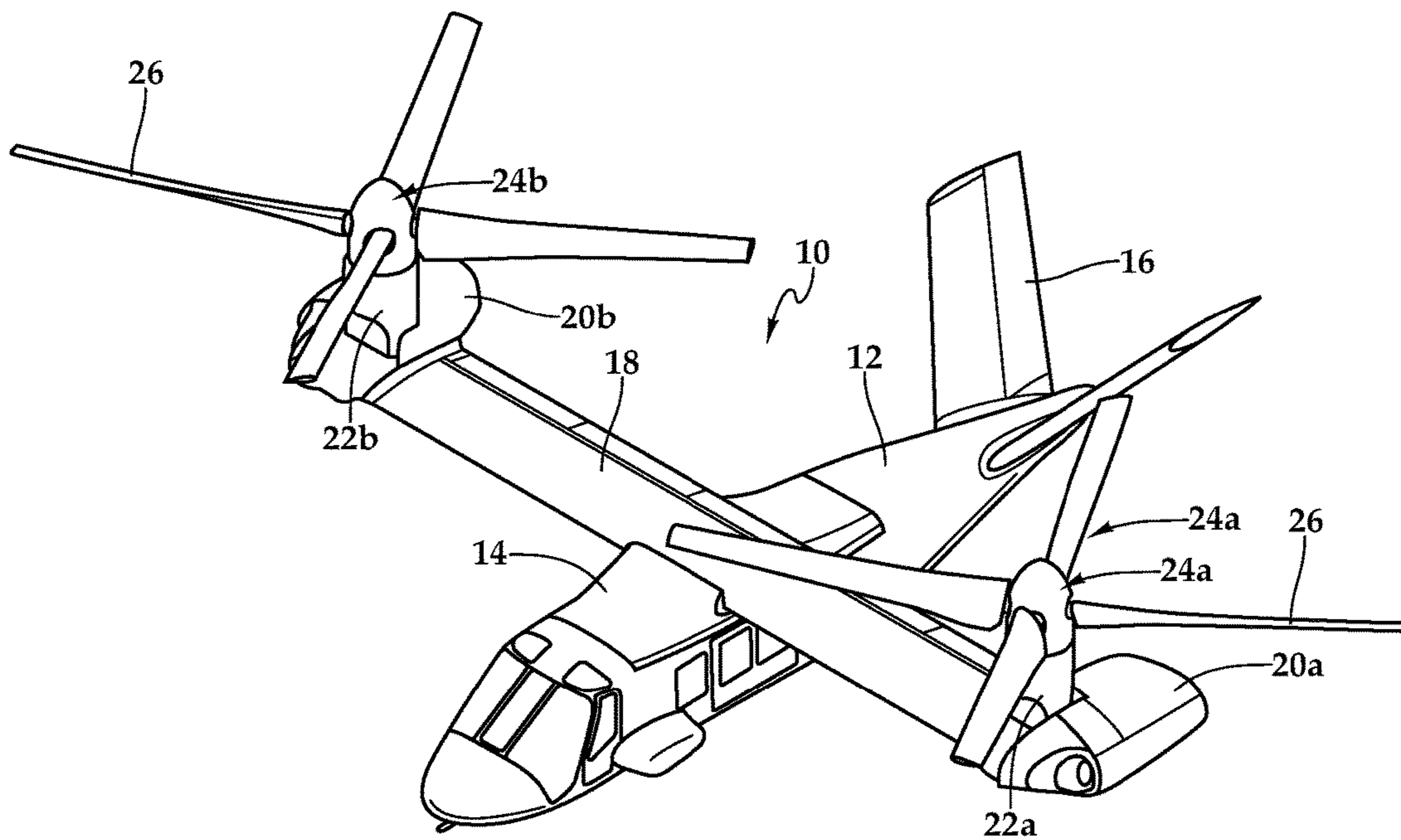


Fig.1B

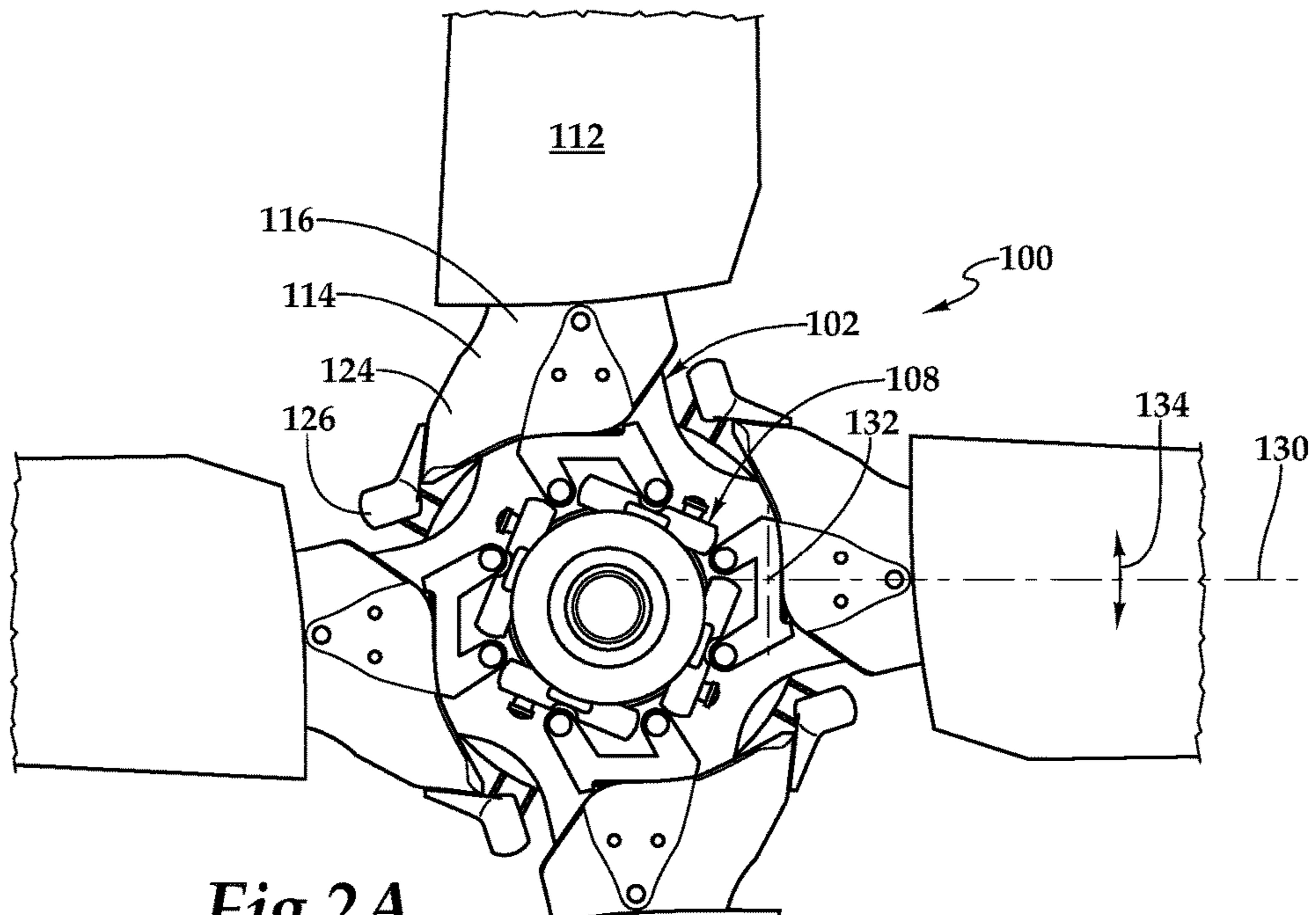


Fig.2A

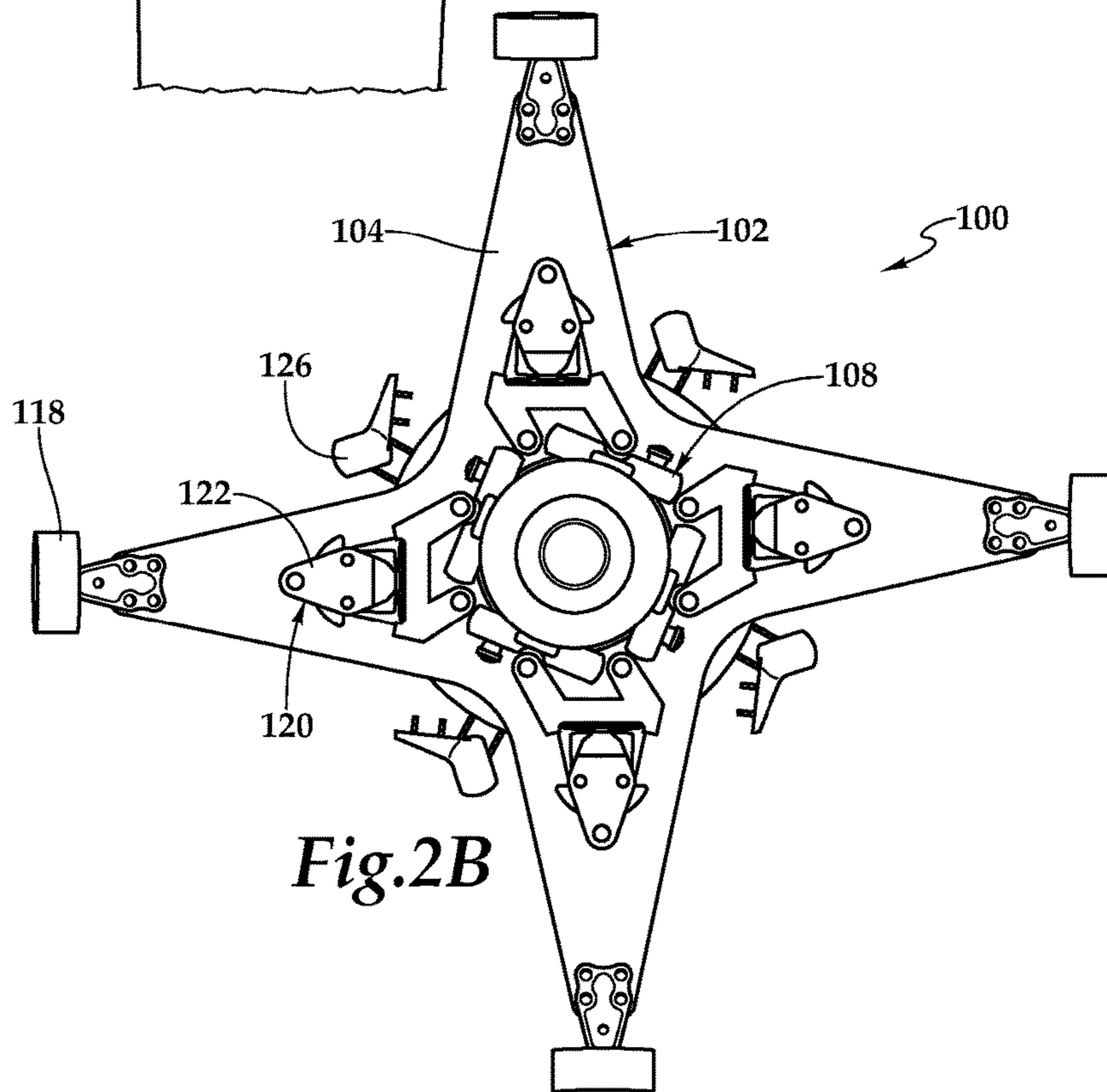


Fig.2B

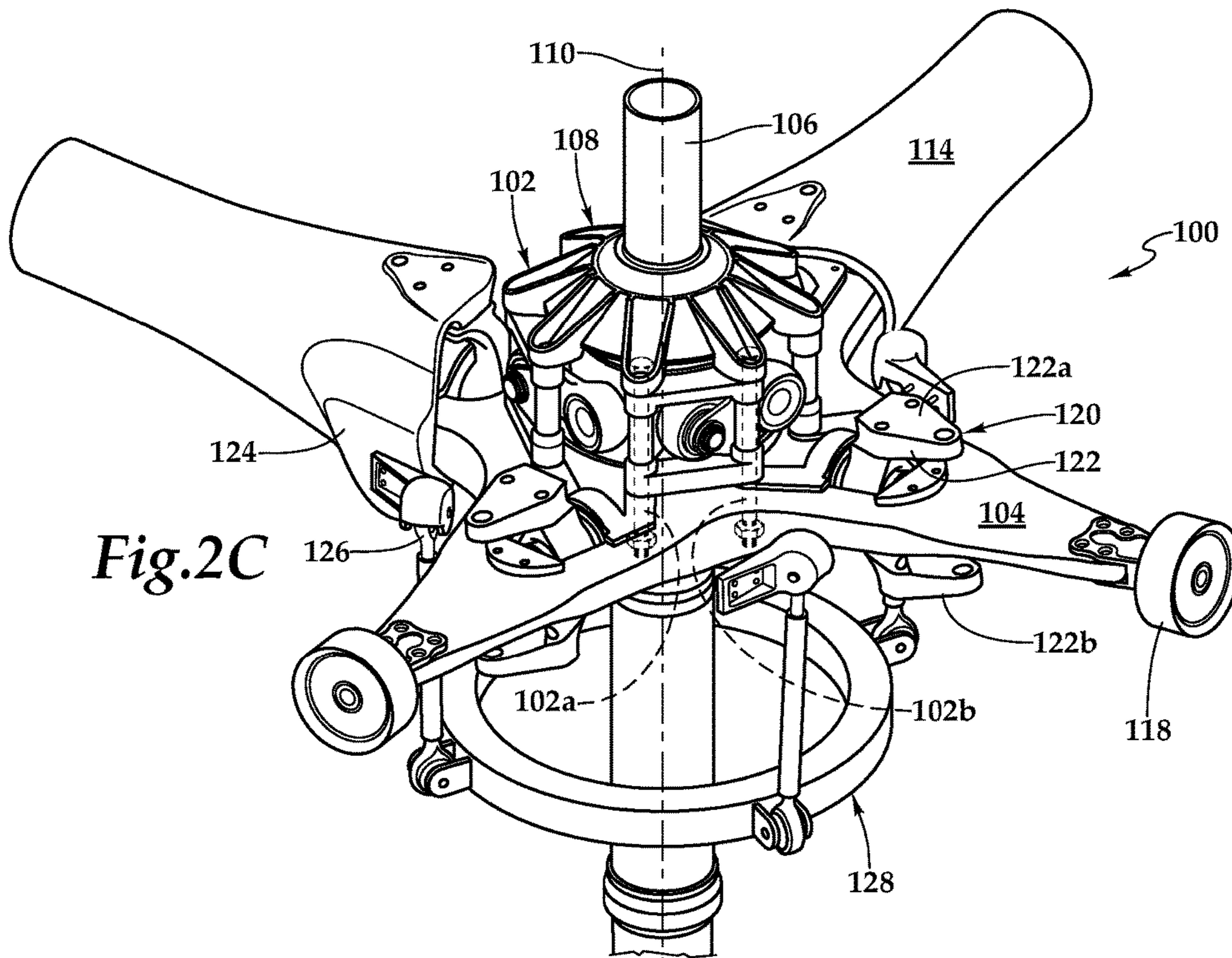


Fig.2C

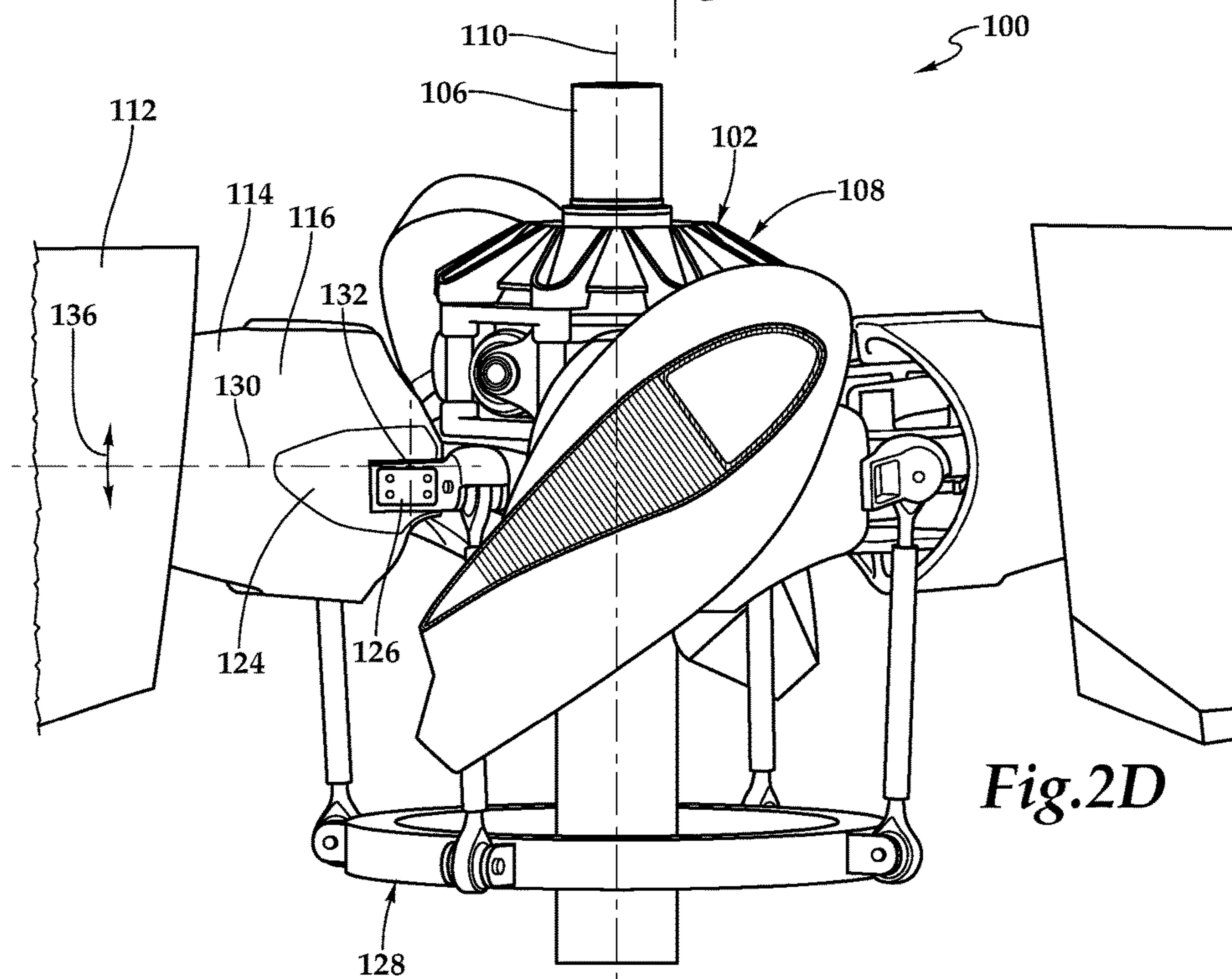


Fig.2D

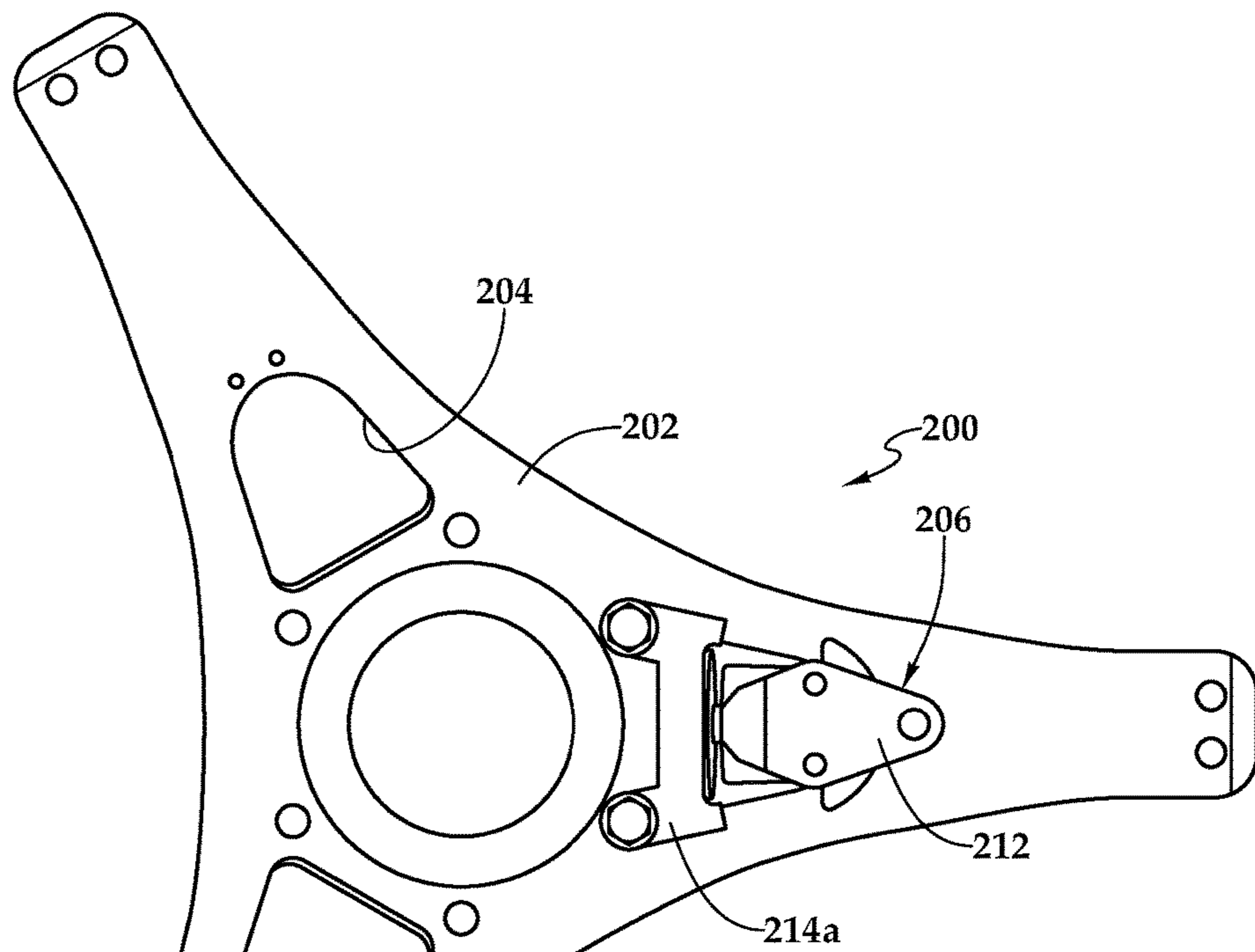


Fig.3A

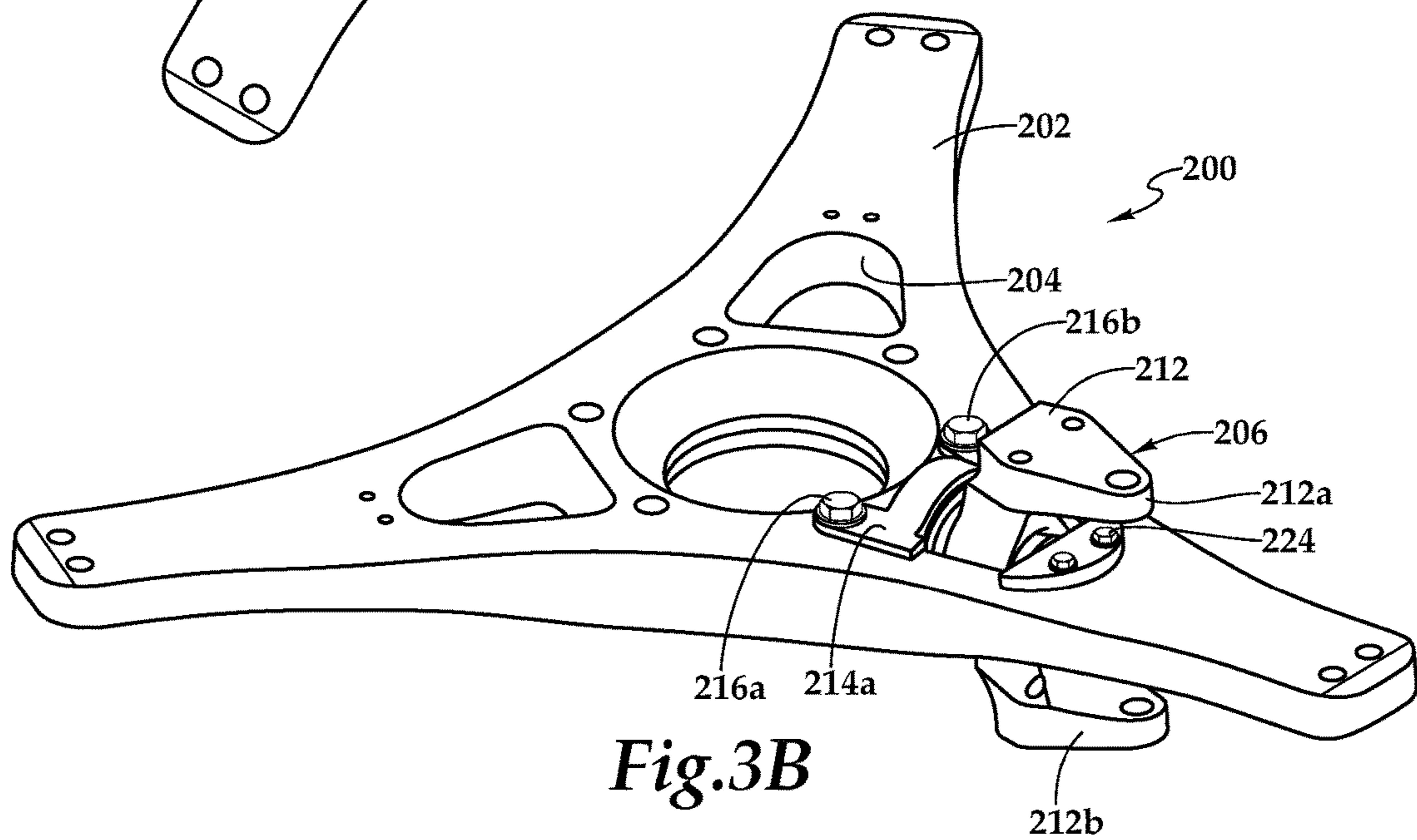


Fig.3B

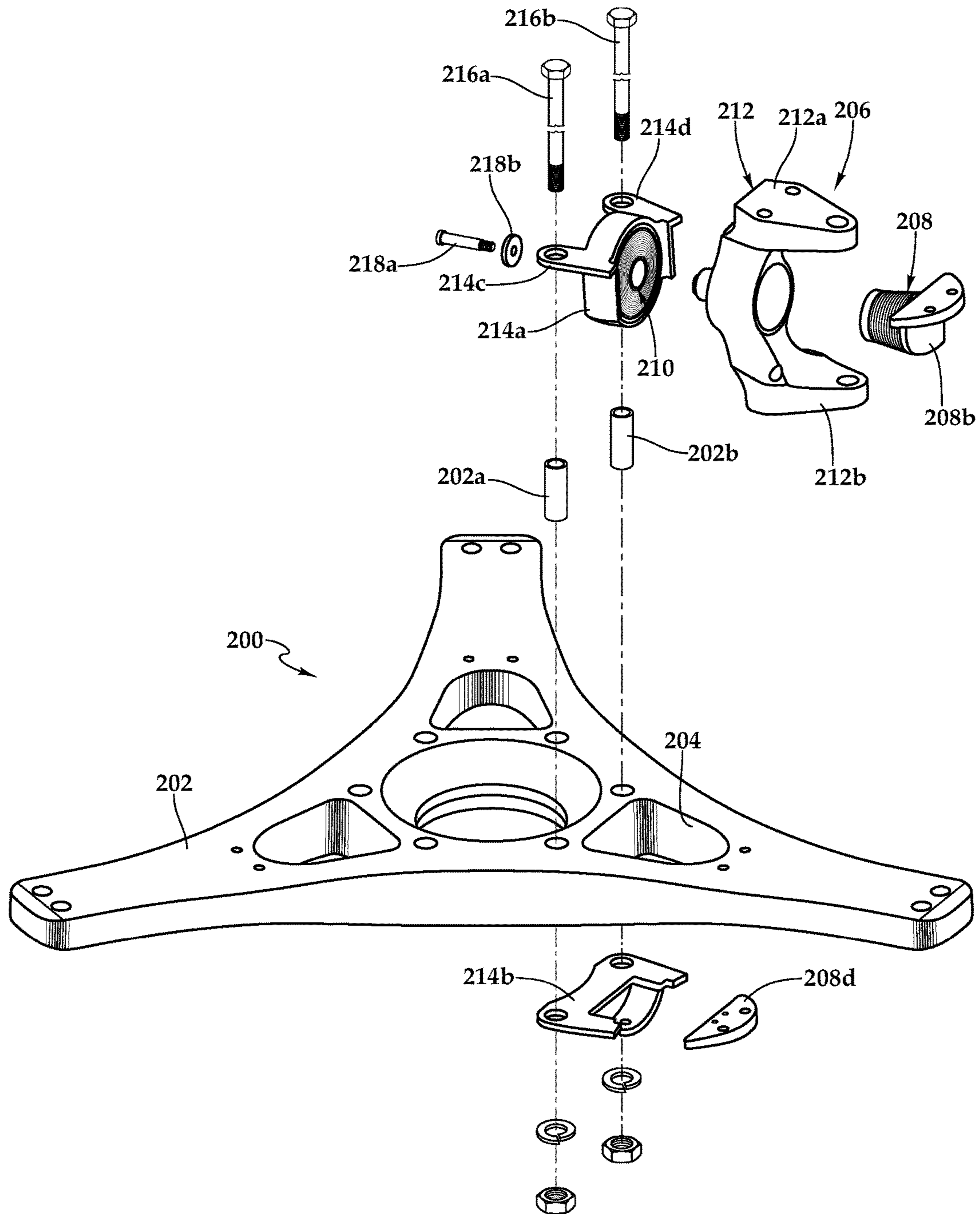


Fig.3C

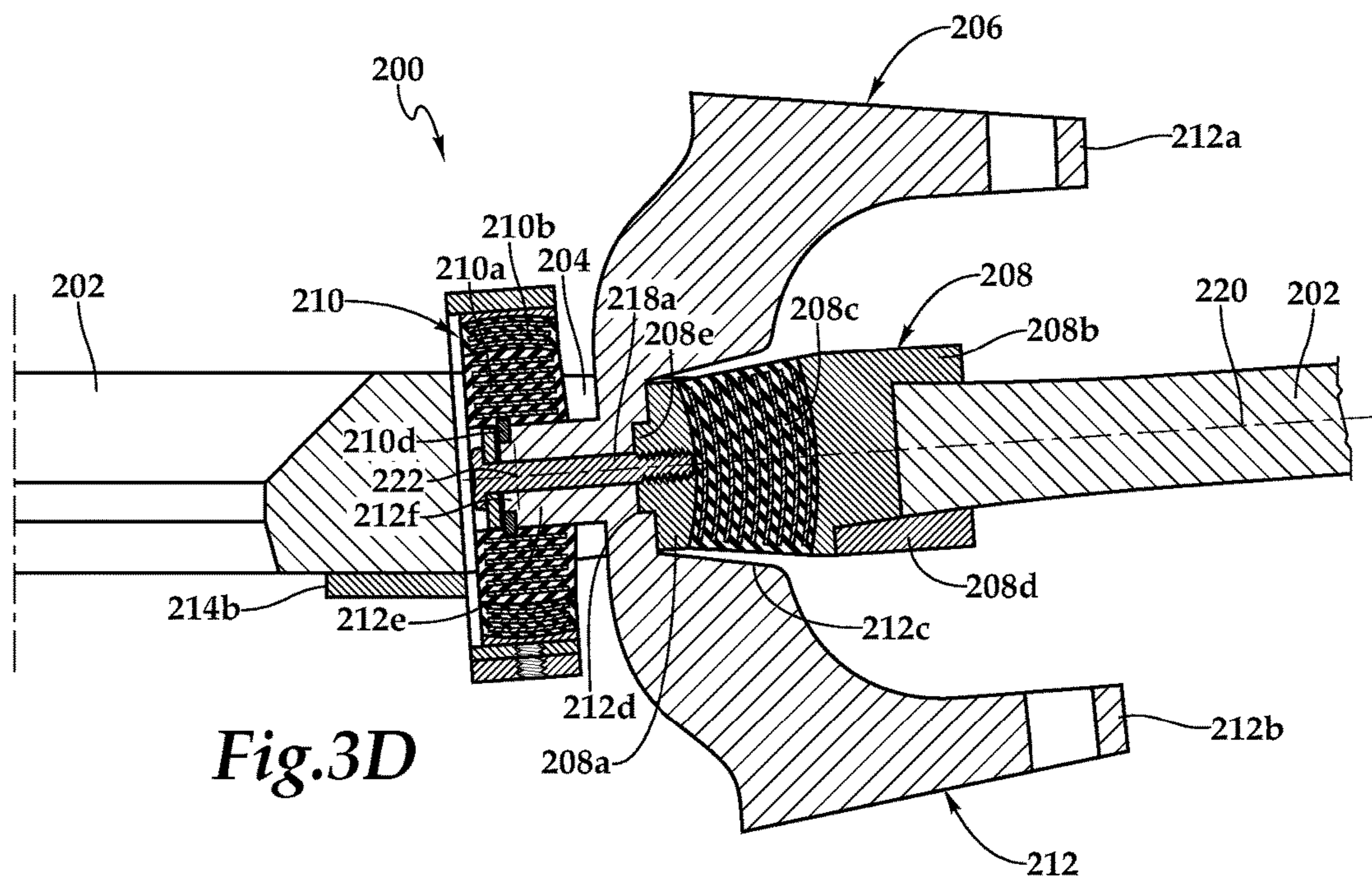


Fig.3D

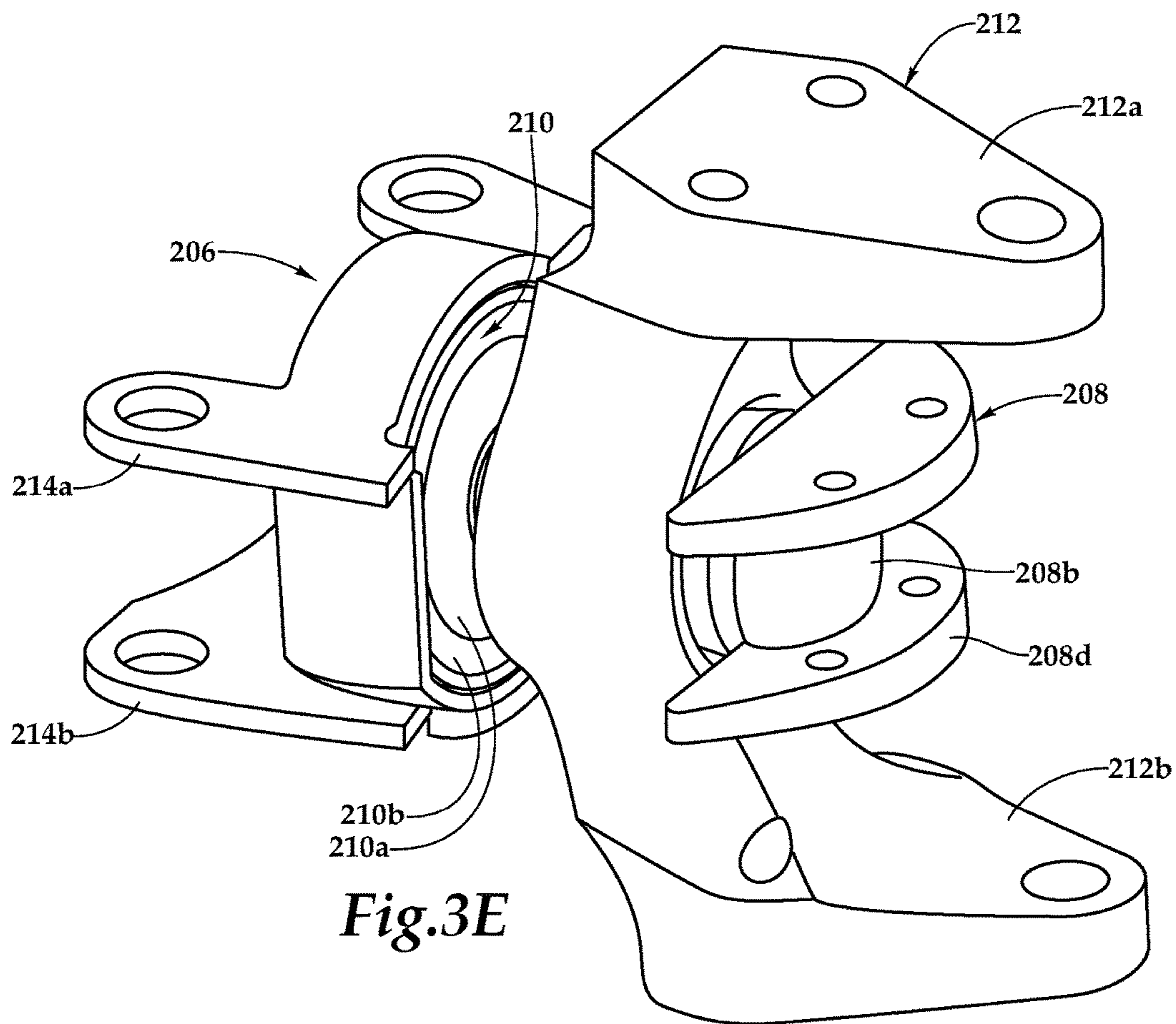


Fig.3E

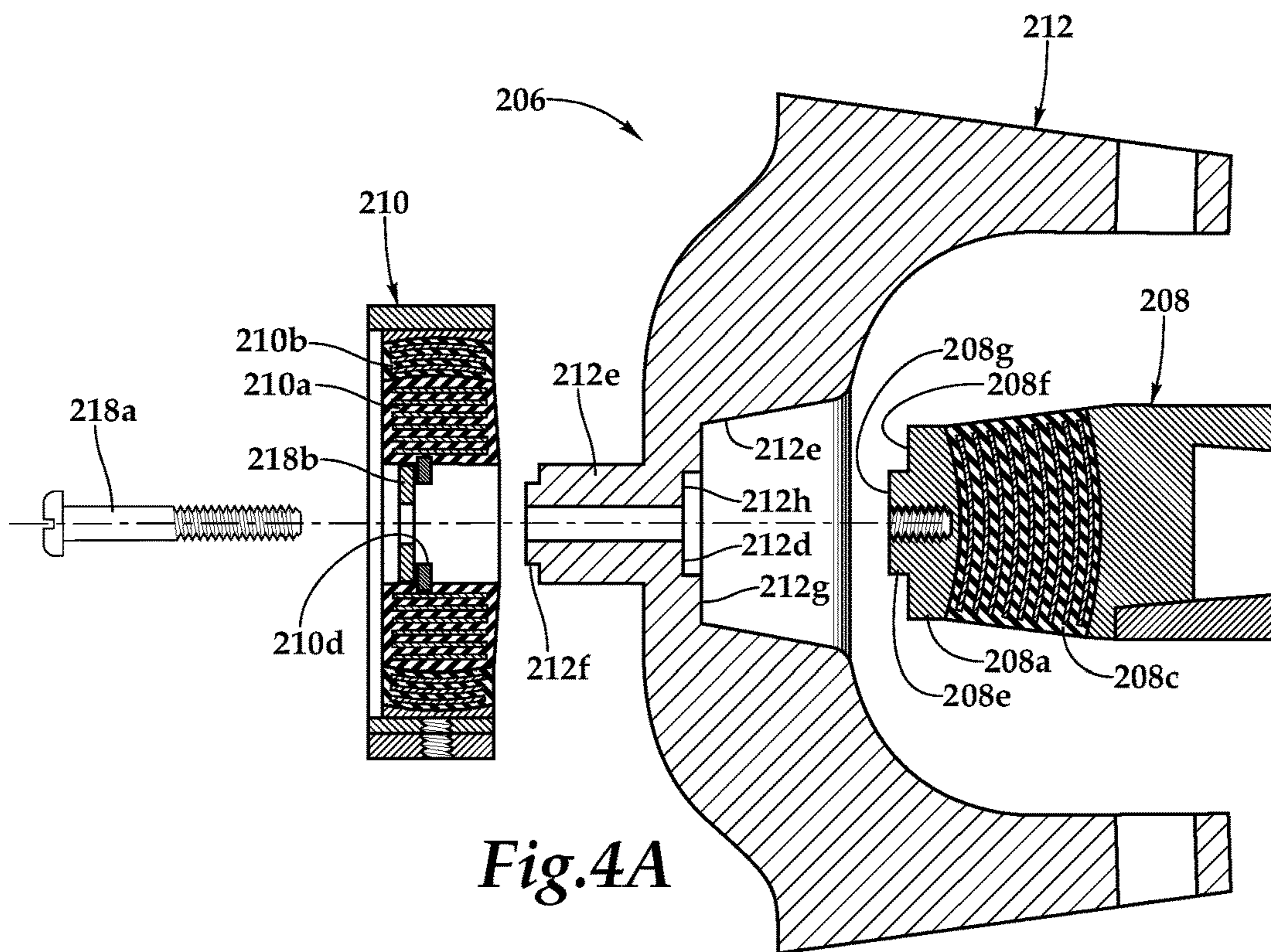


Fig. 4A

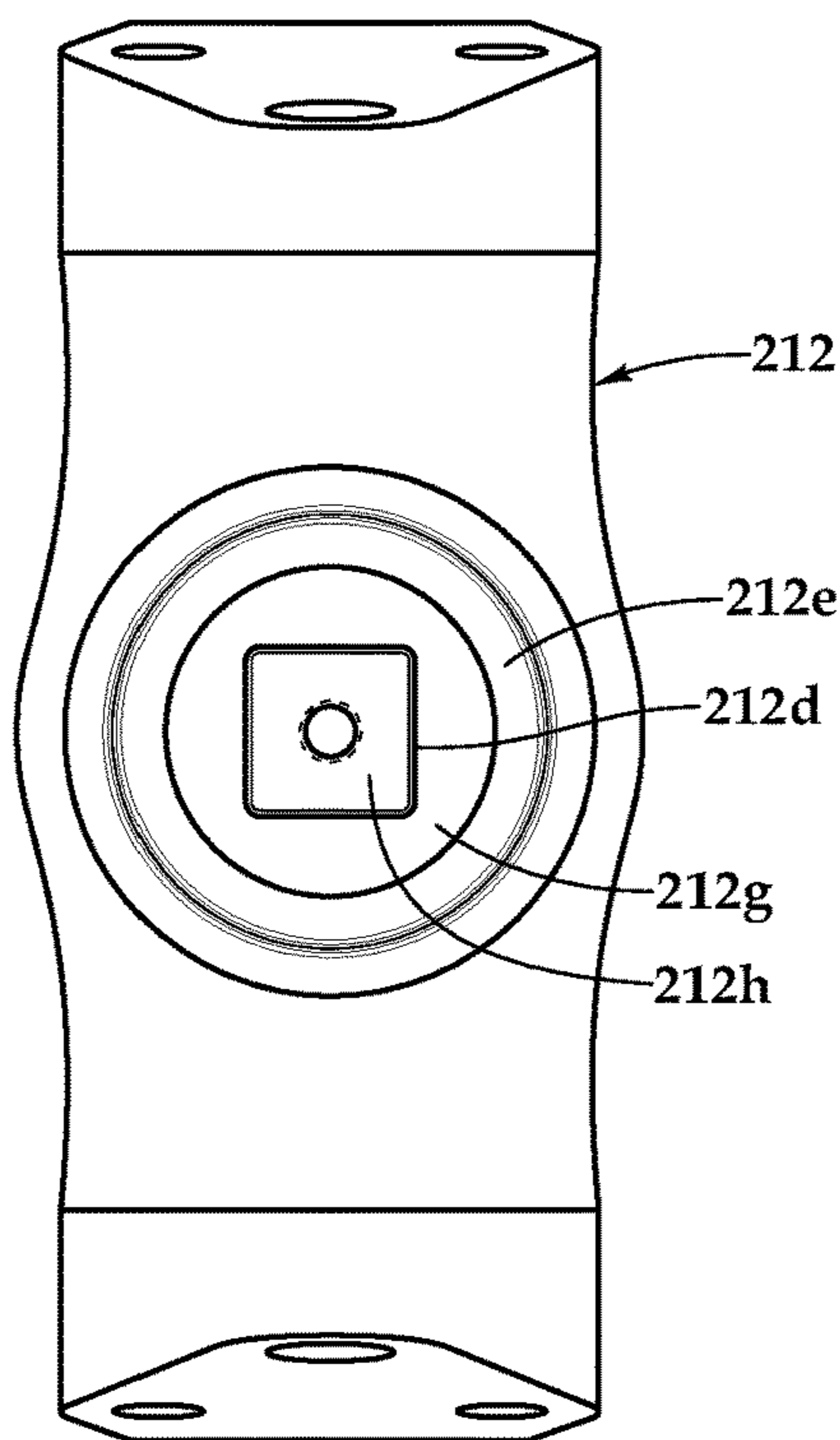


Fig. 4B

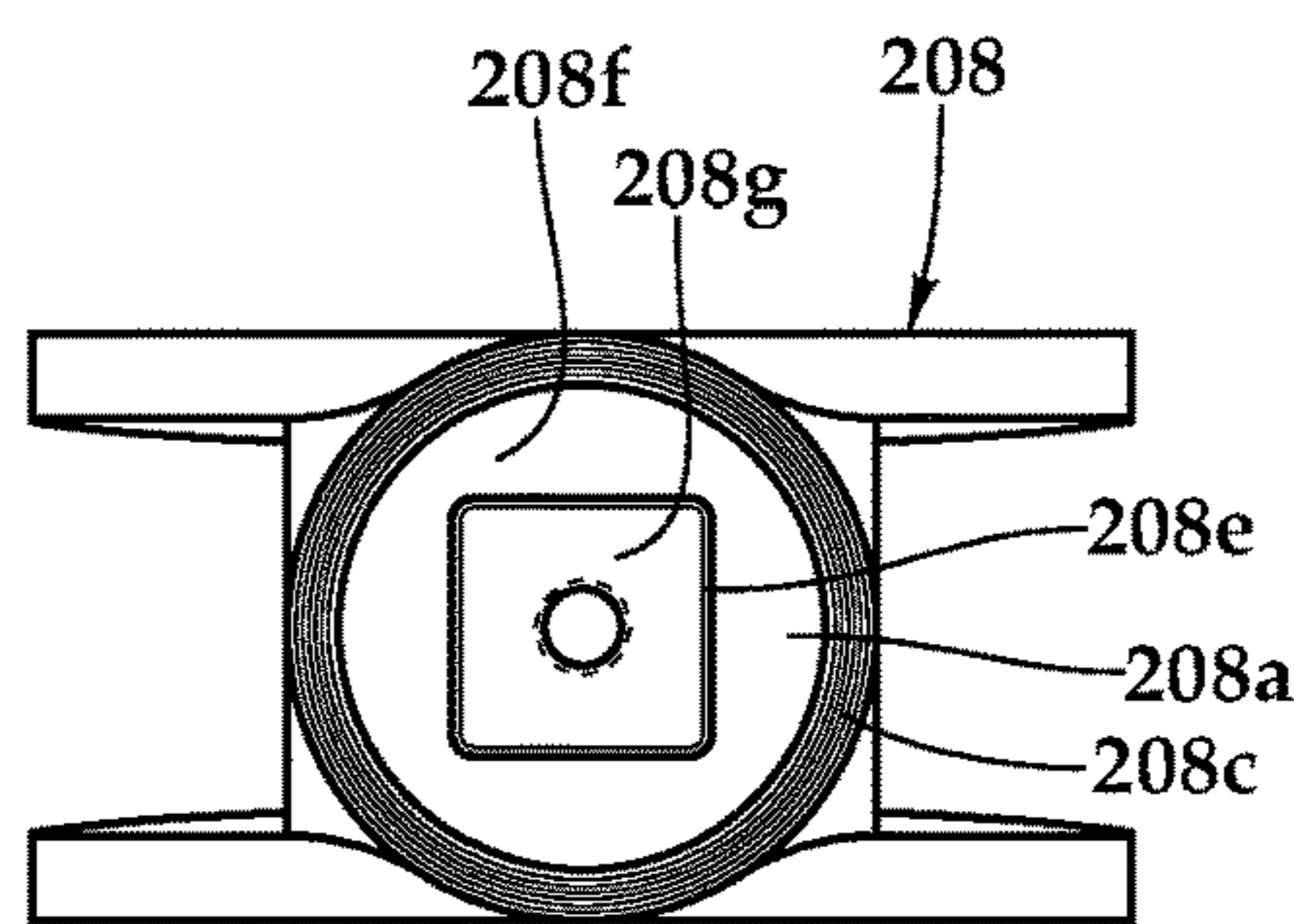


Fig. 4C

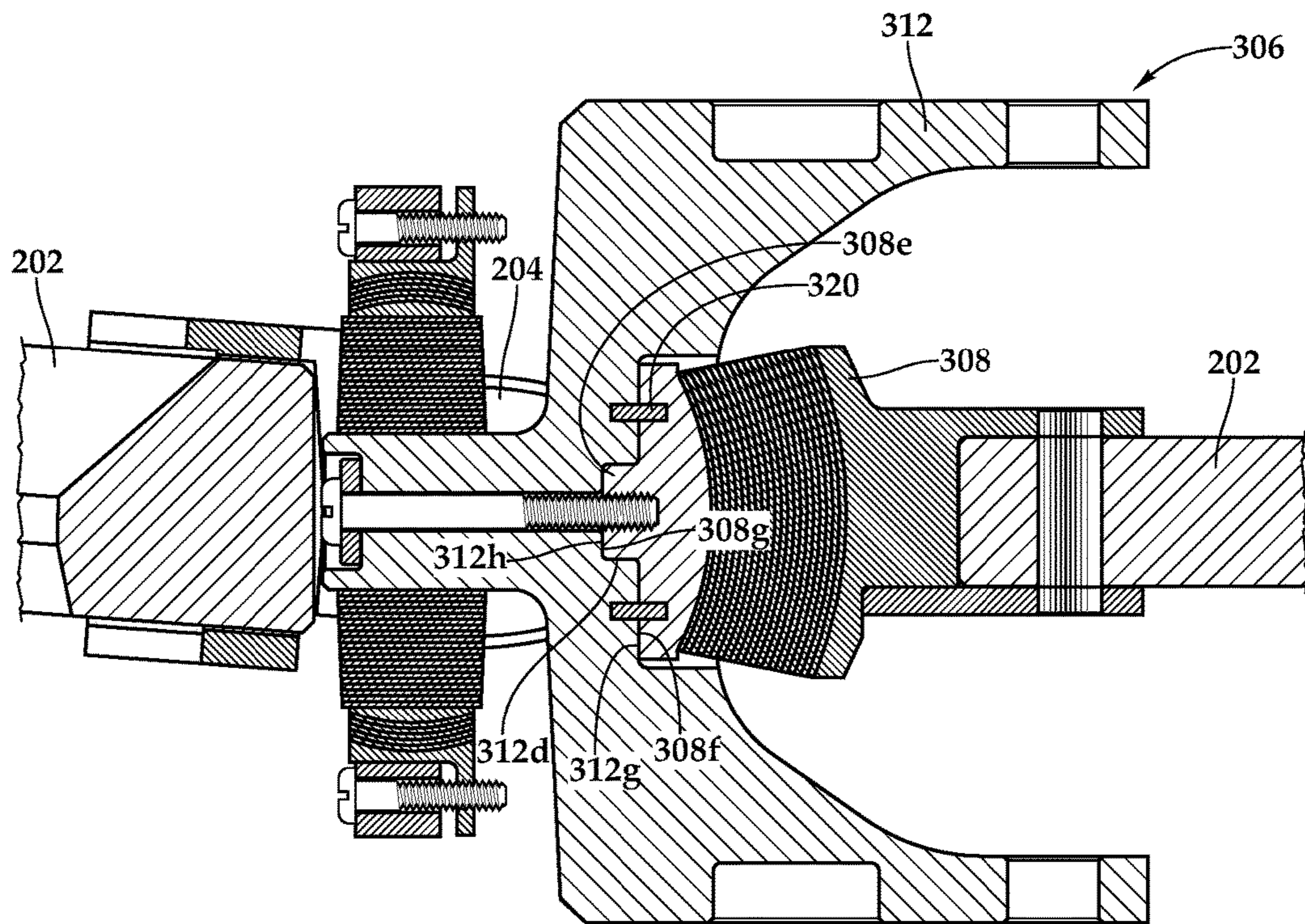


Fig.5A

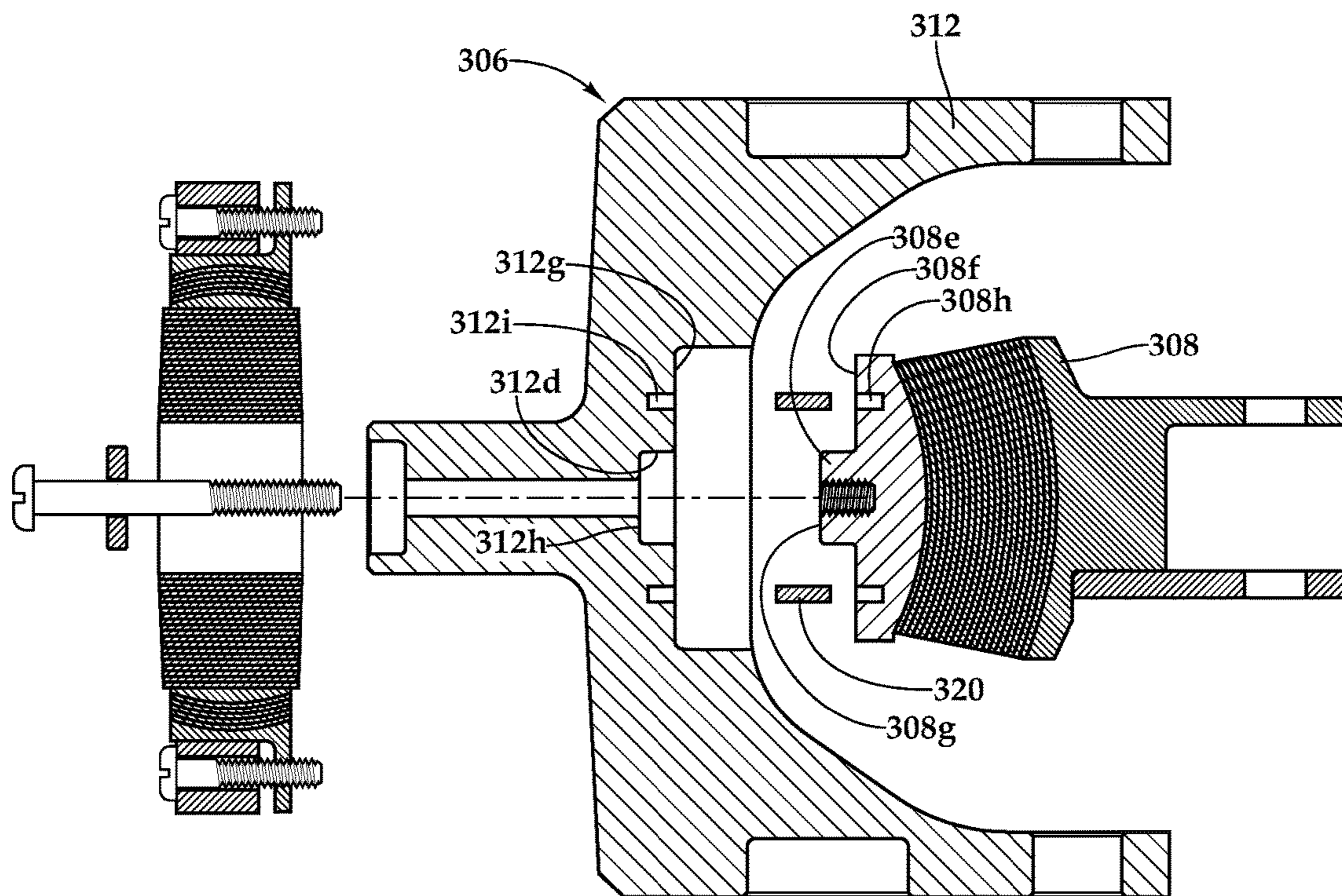


Fig.5B

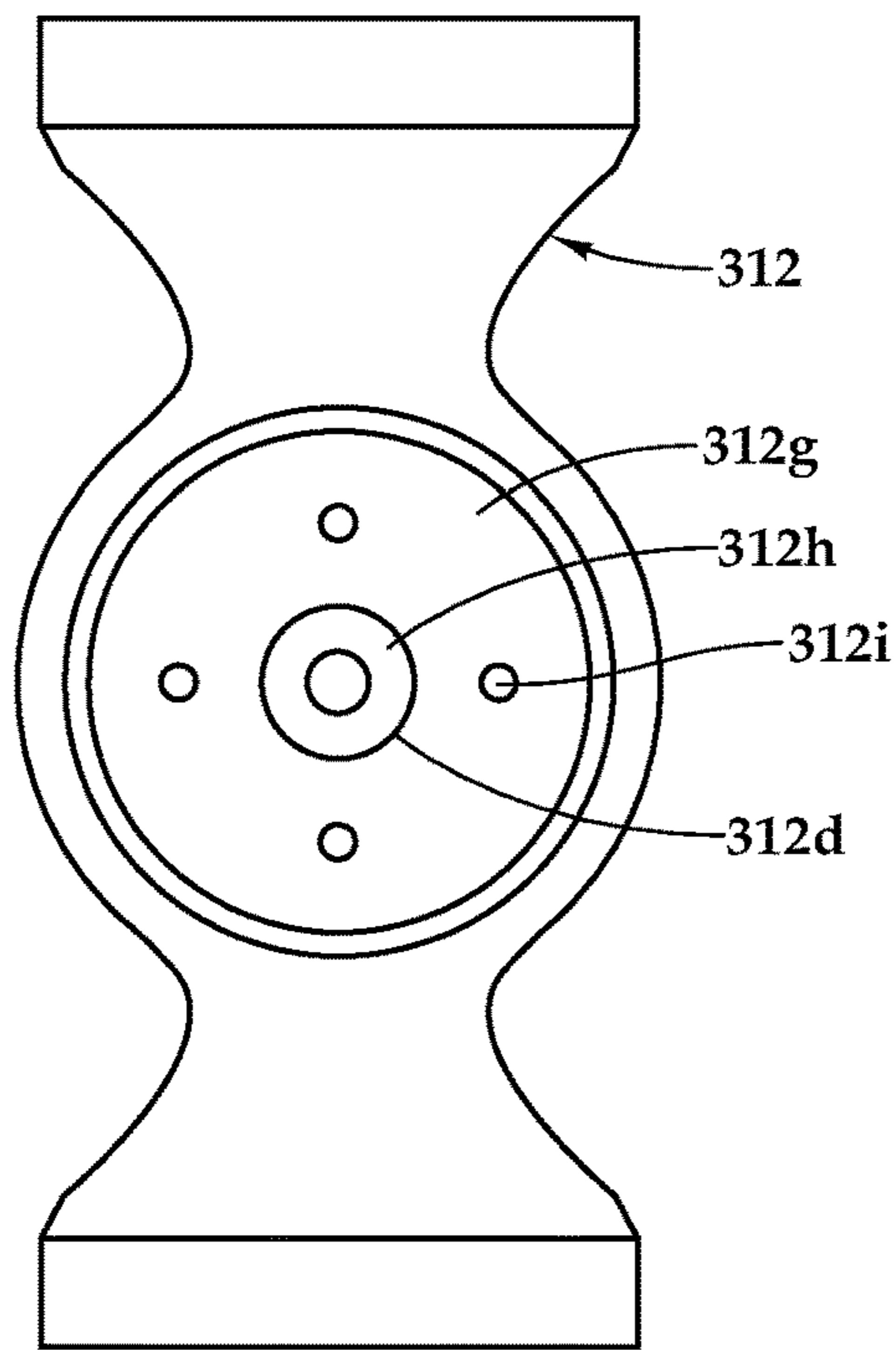


Fig.5C

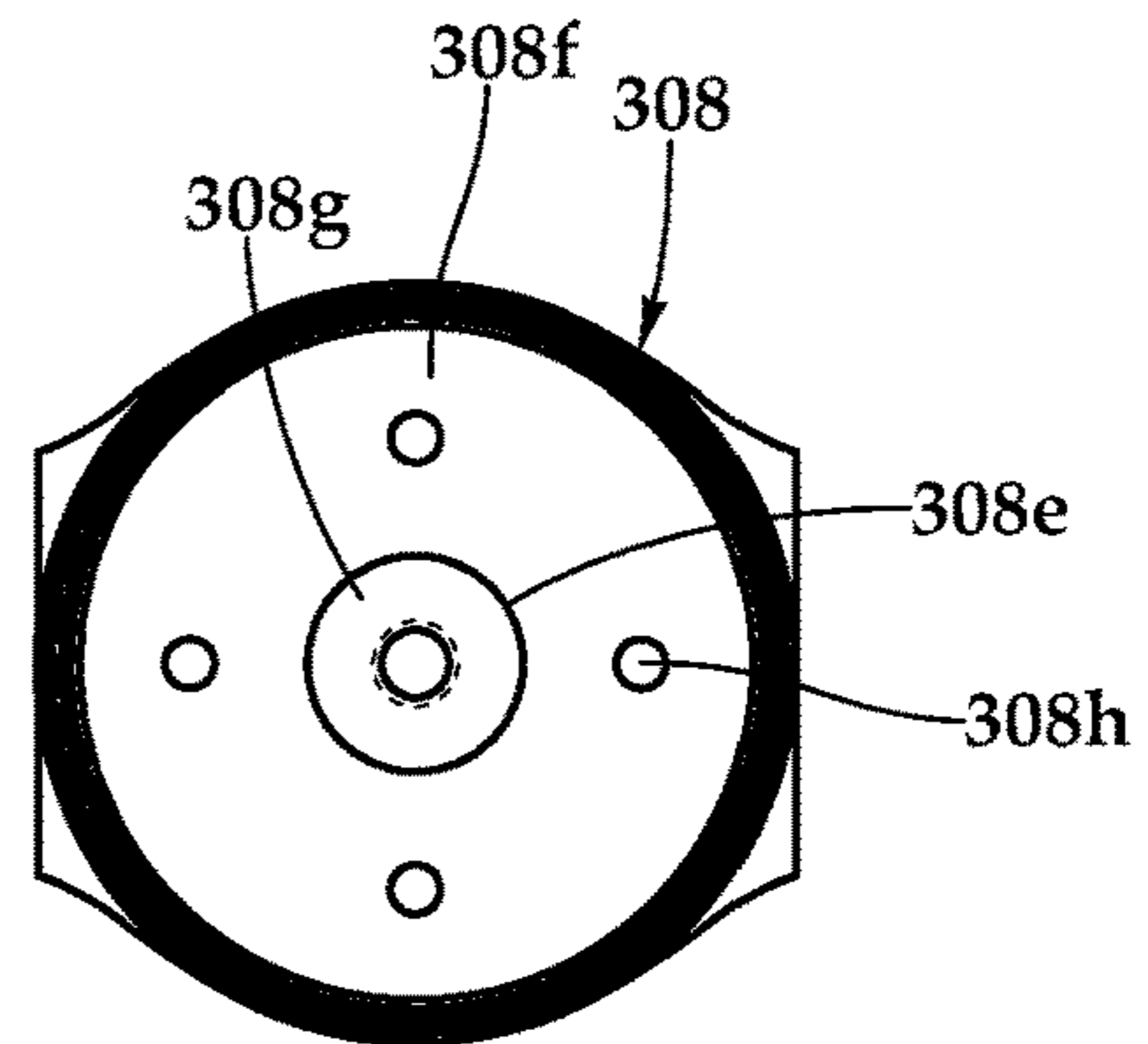


Fig.5D

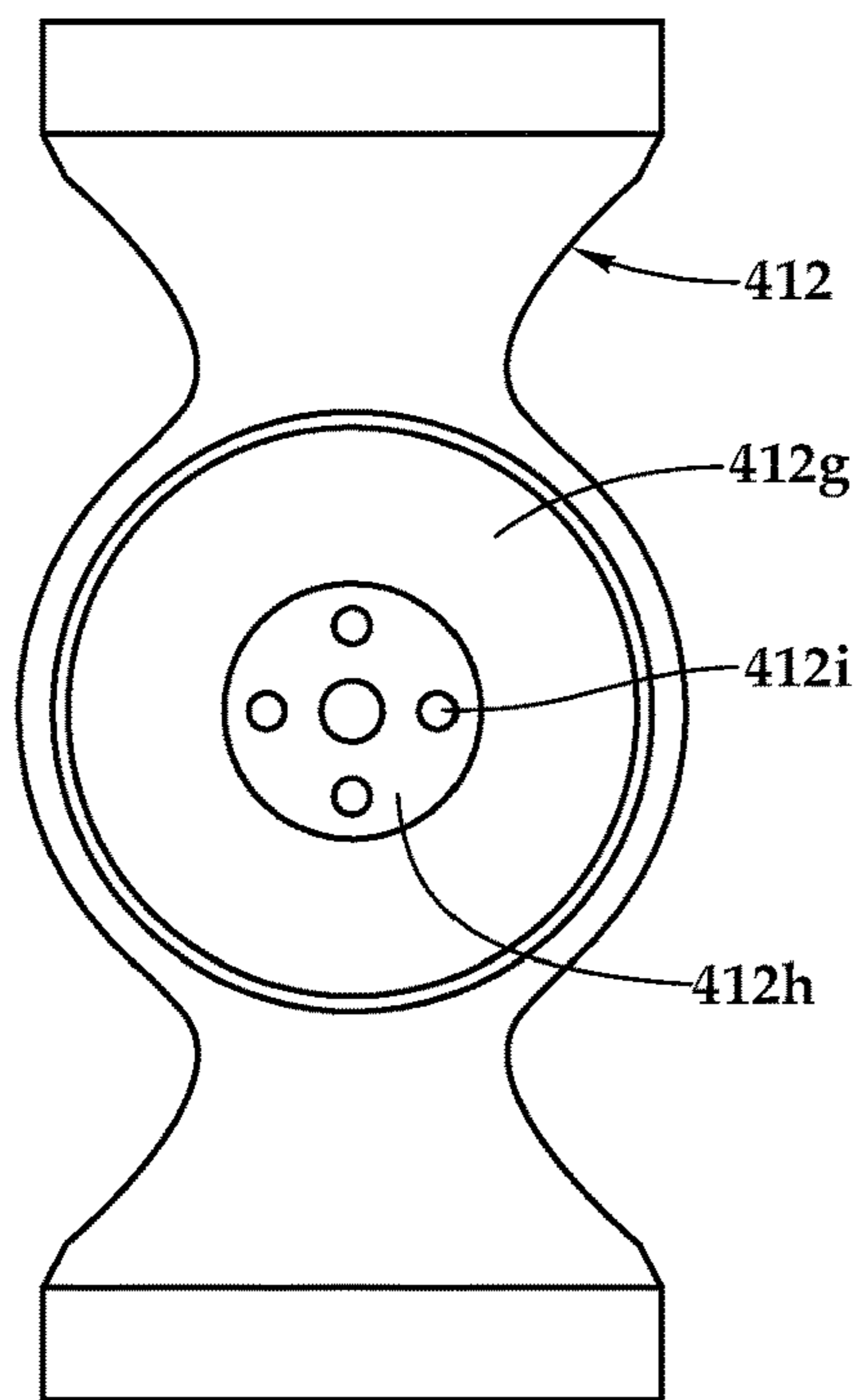


Fig.6C

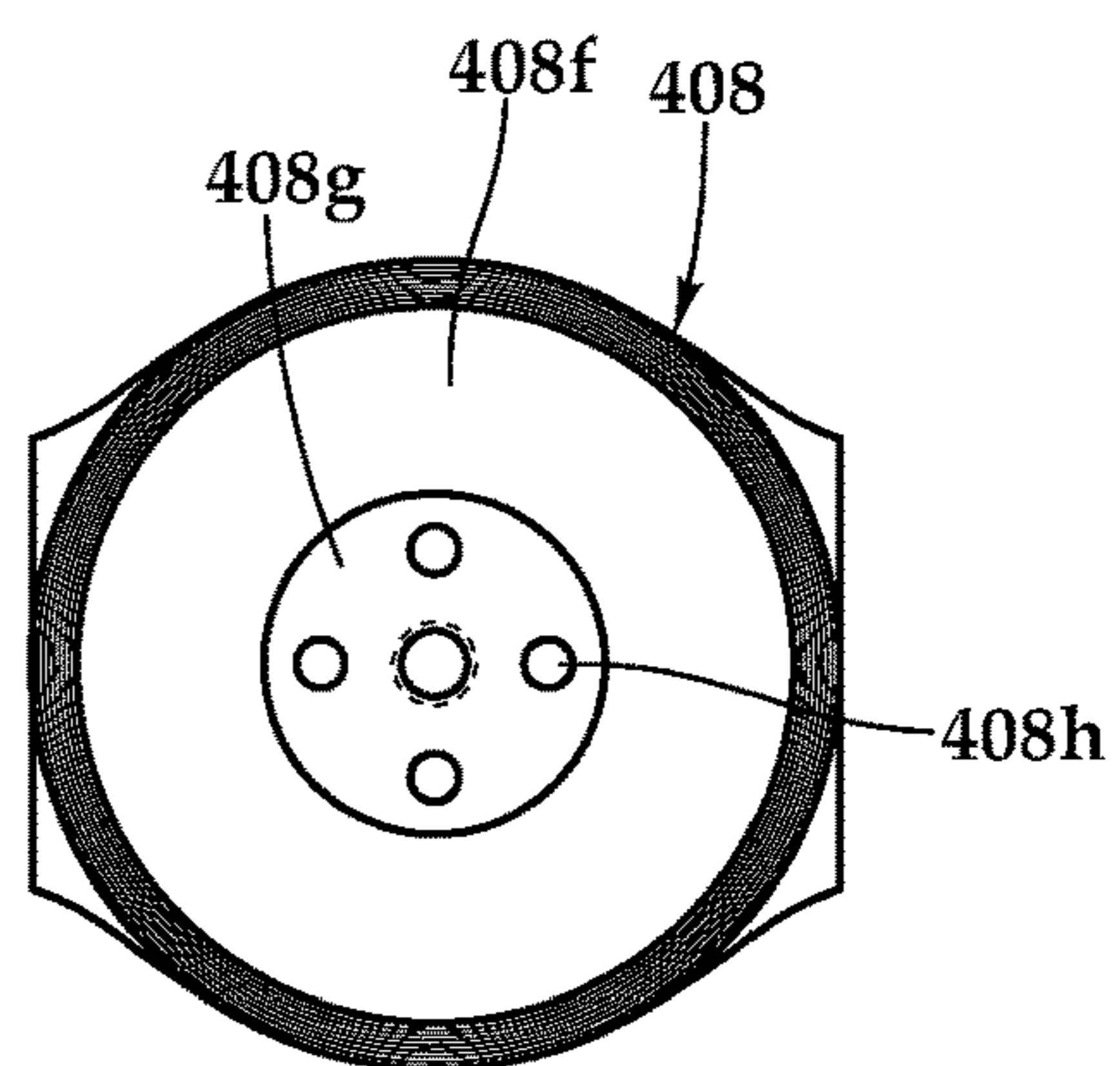


Fig.6D

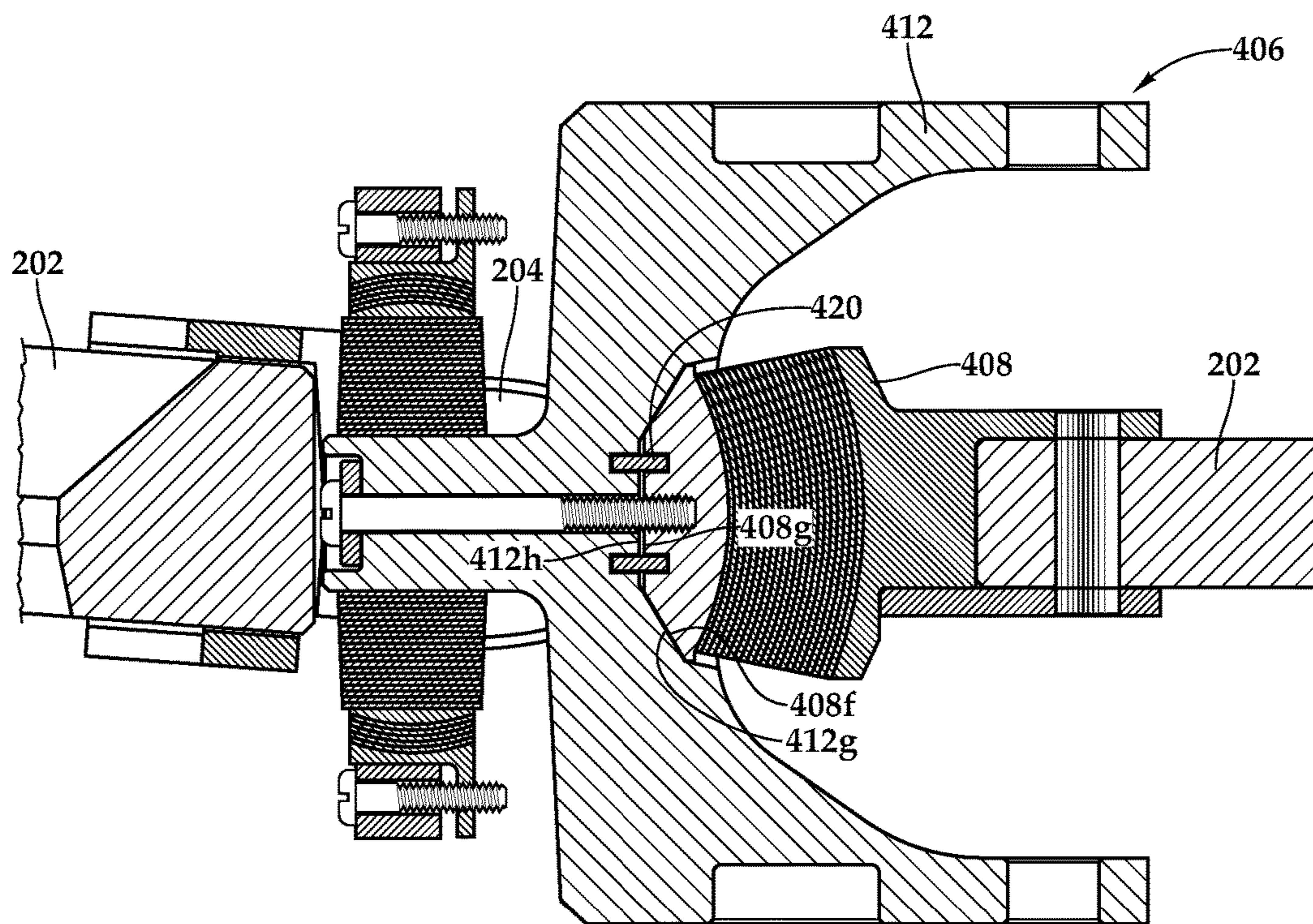


Fig. 6A

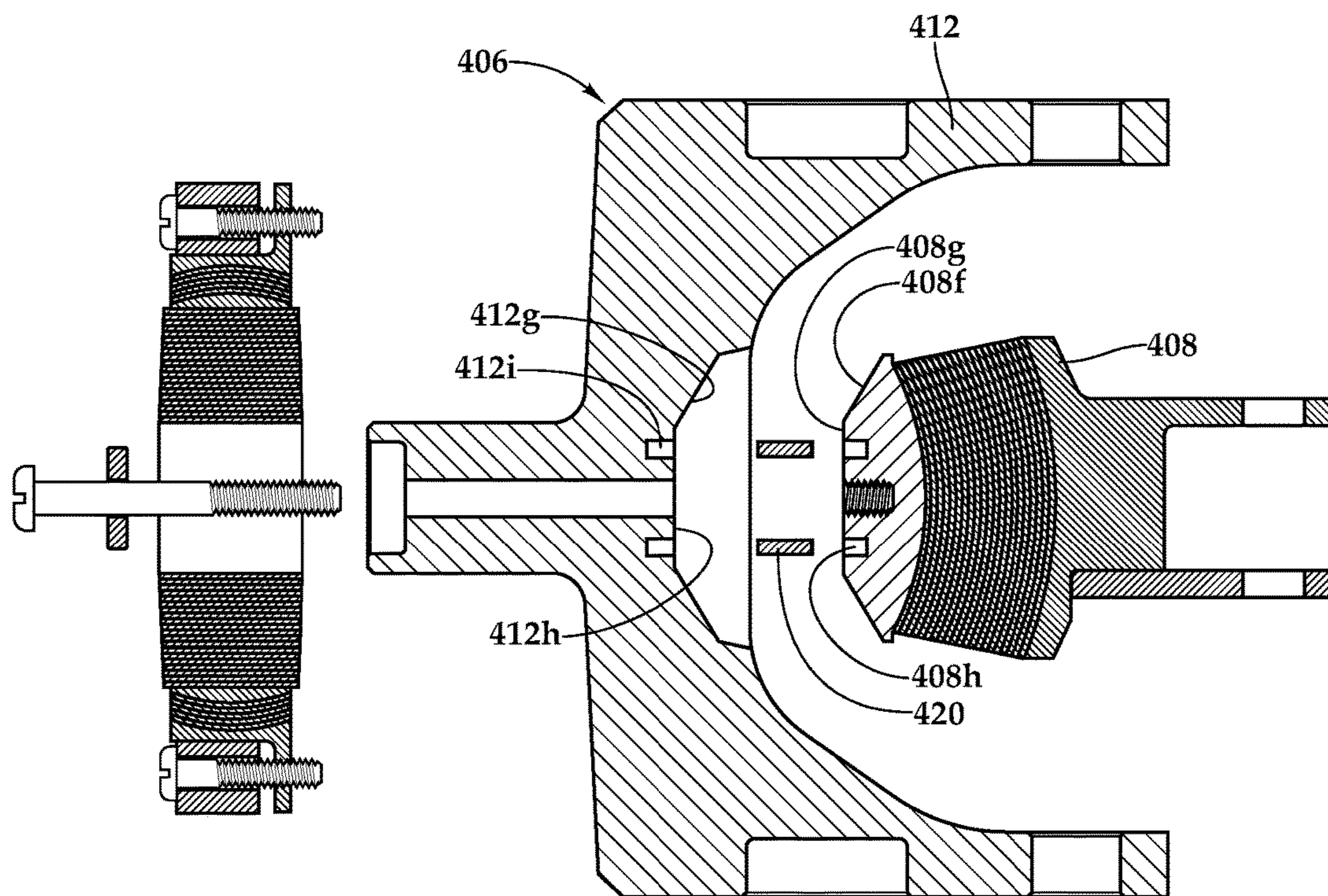


Fig. 6B

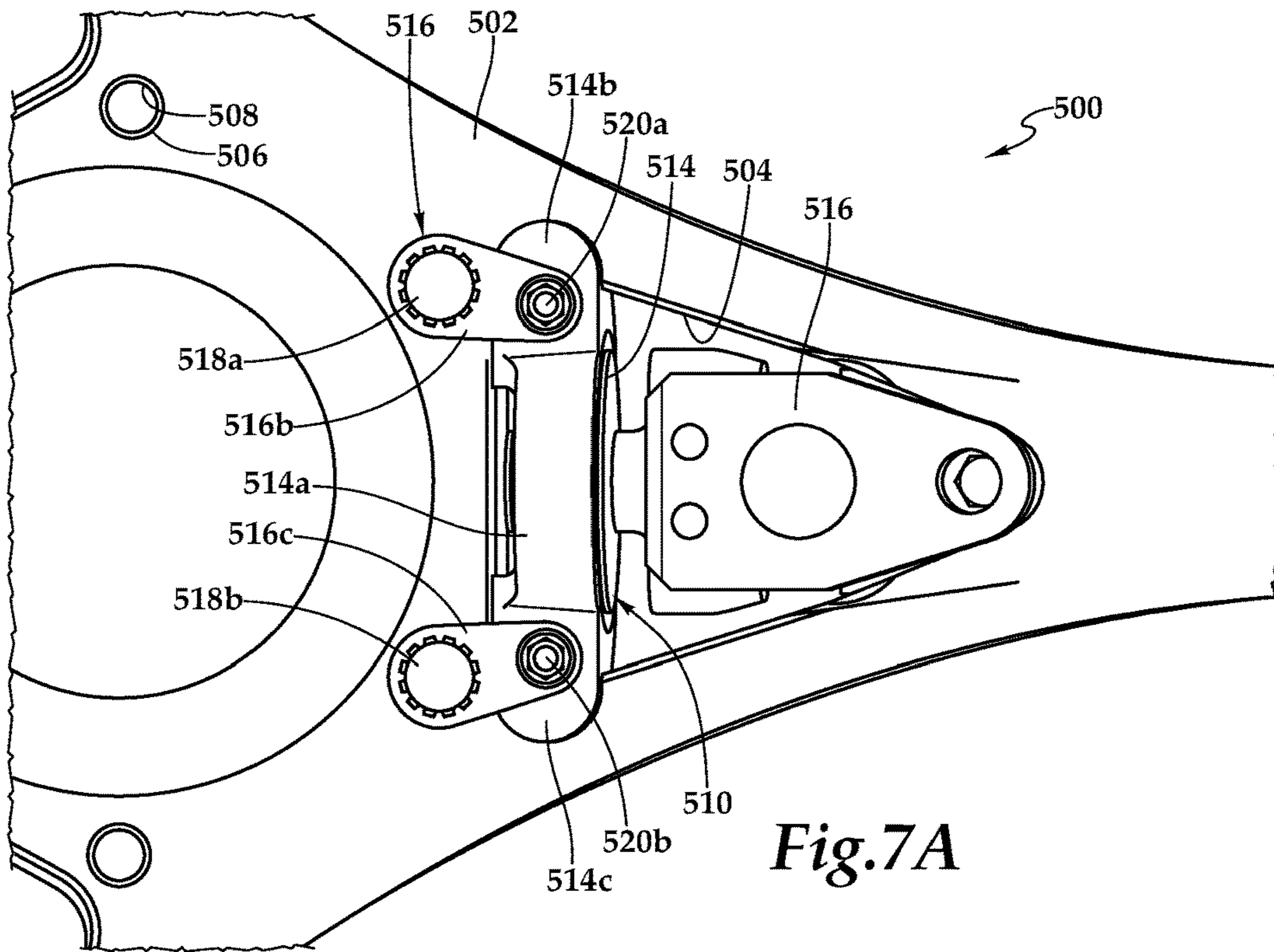


Fig.7A

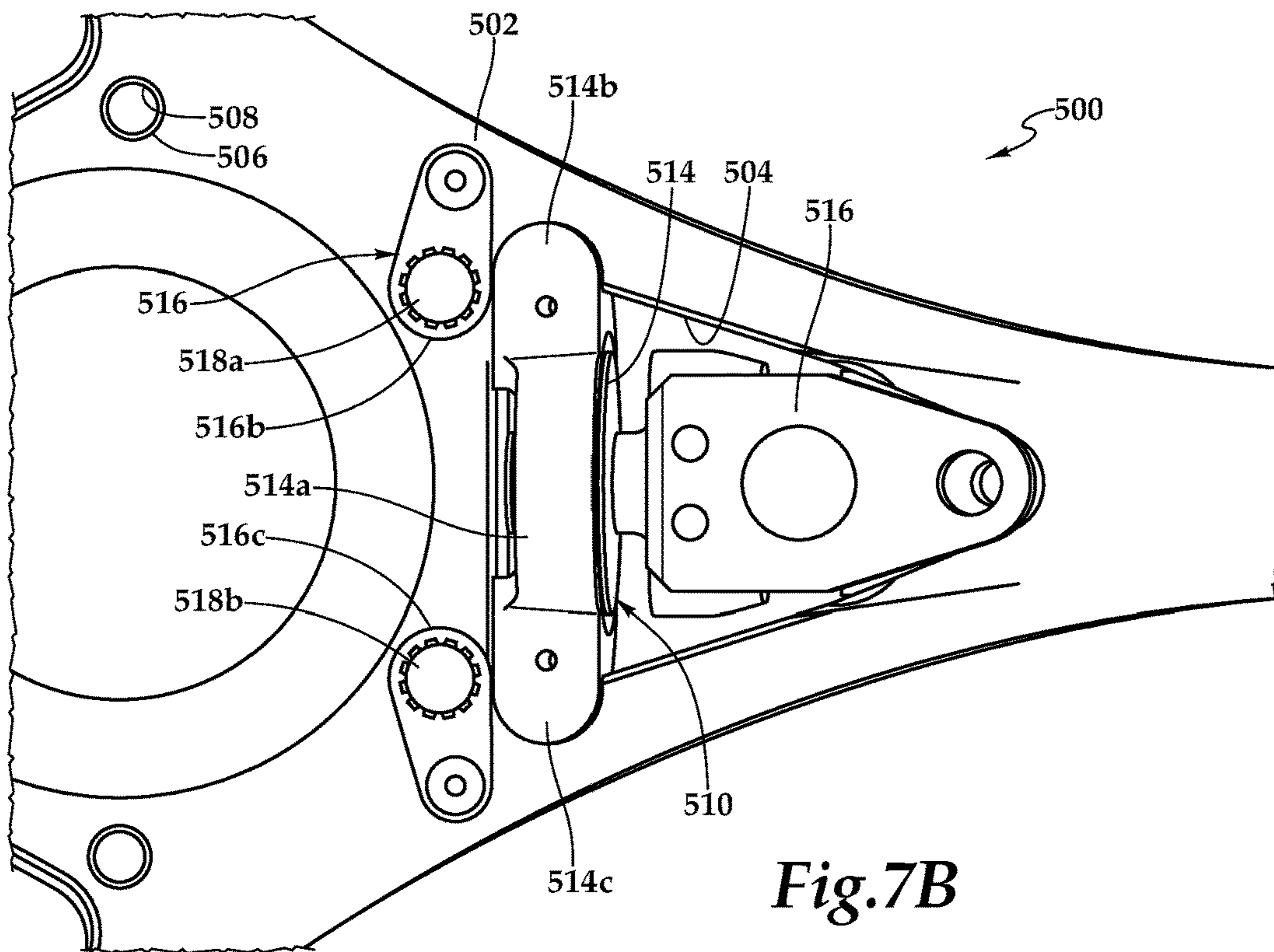


Fig.7B

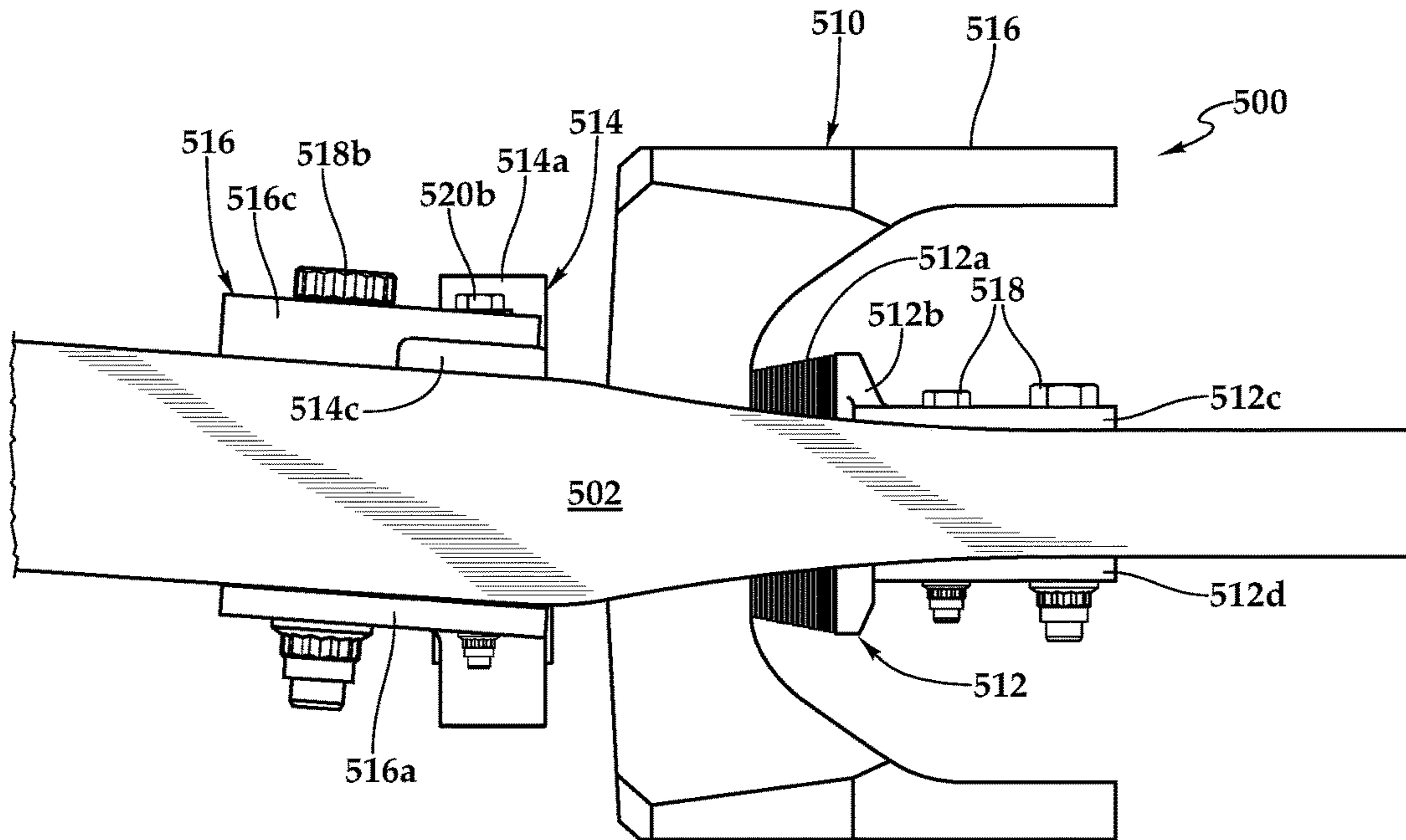


Fig. 7C

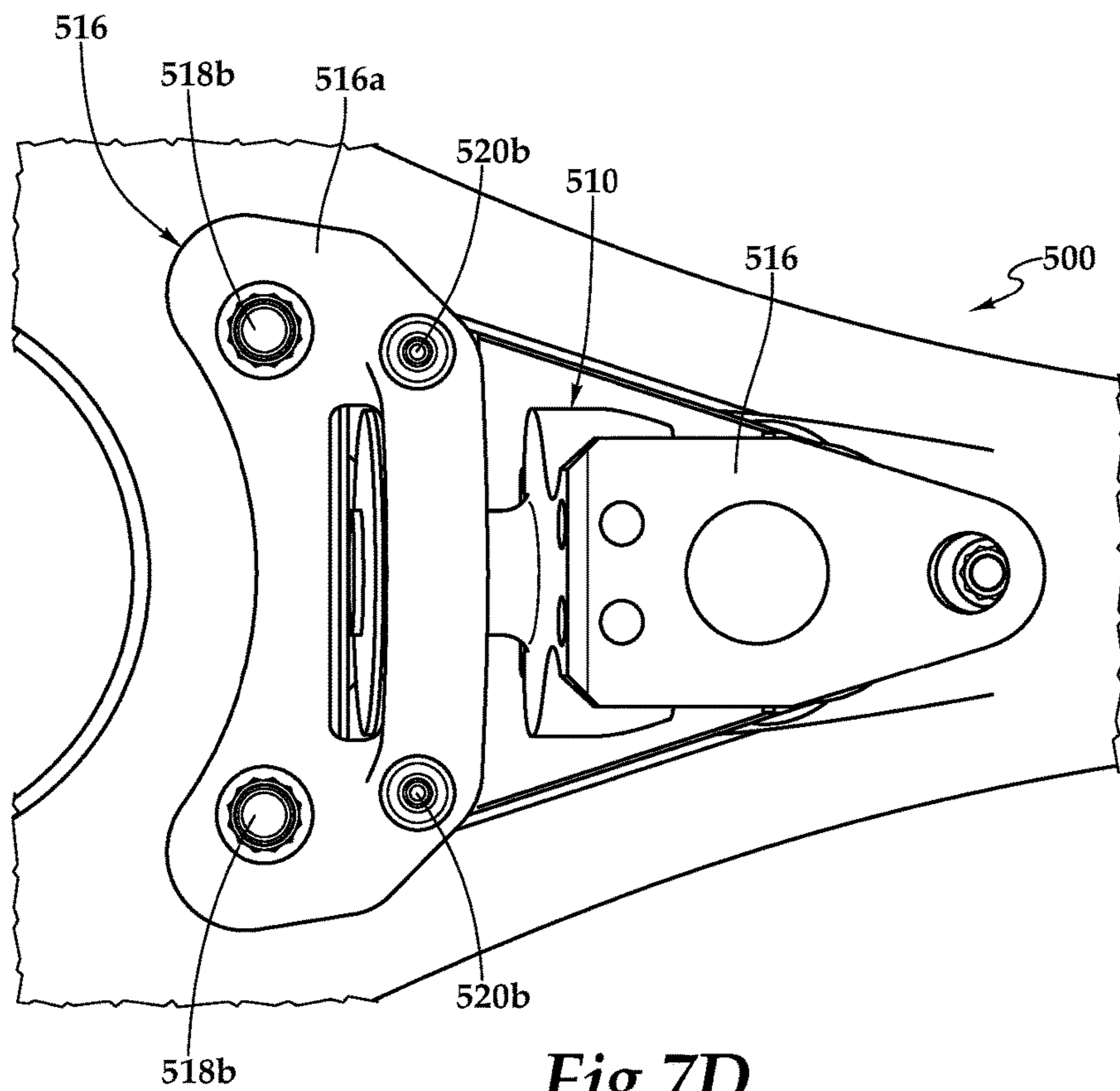
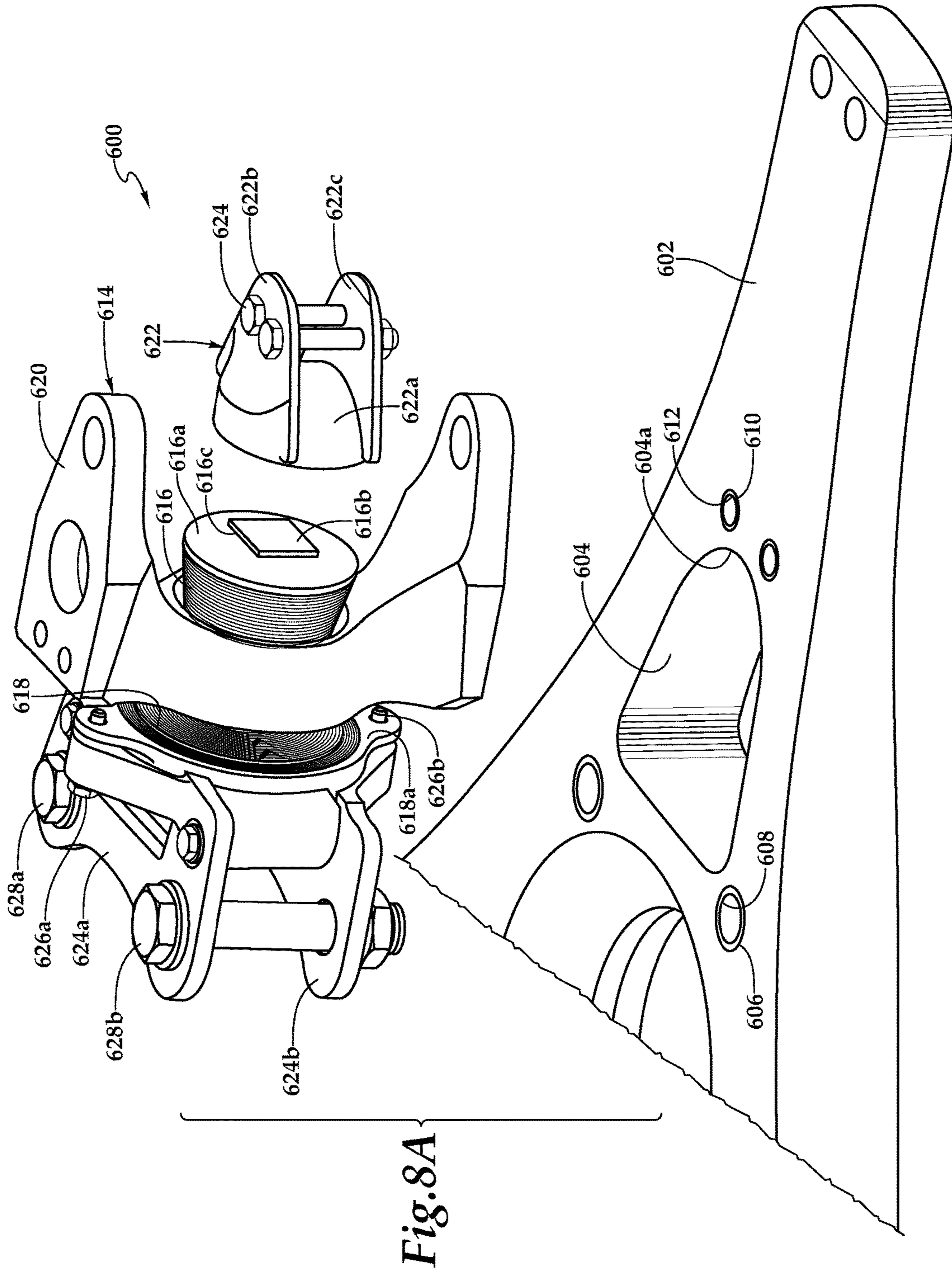


Fig. 7D



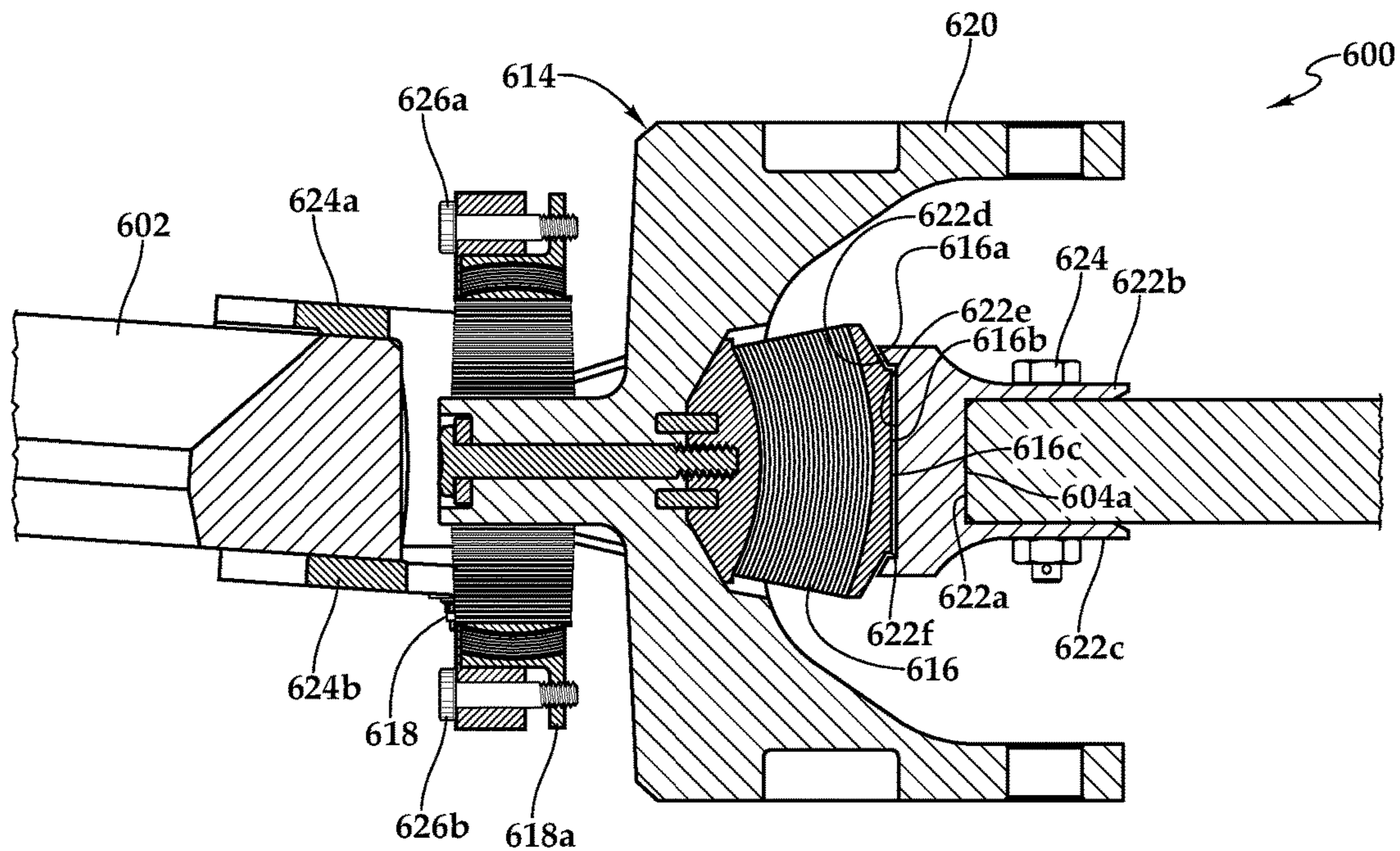


Fig.8B

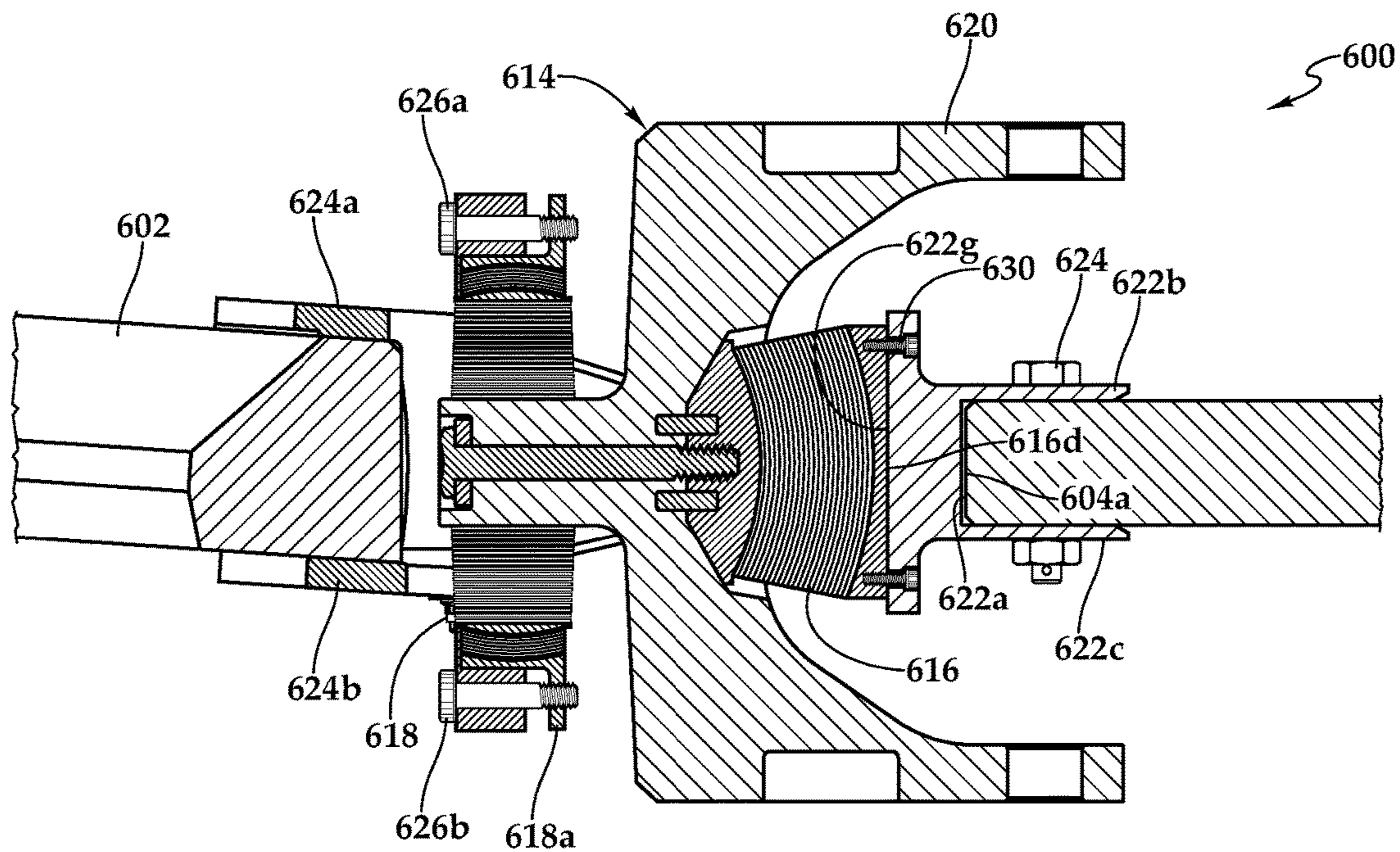


Fig.8C

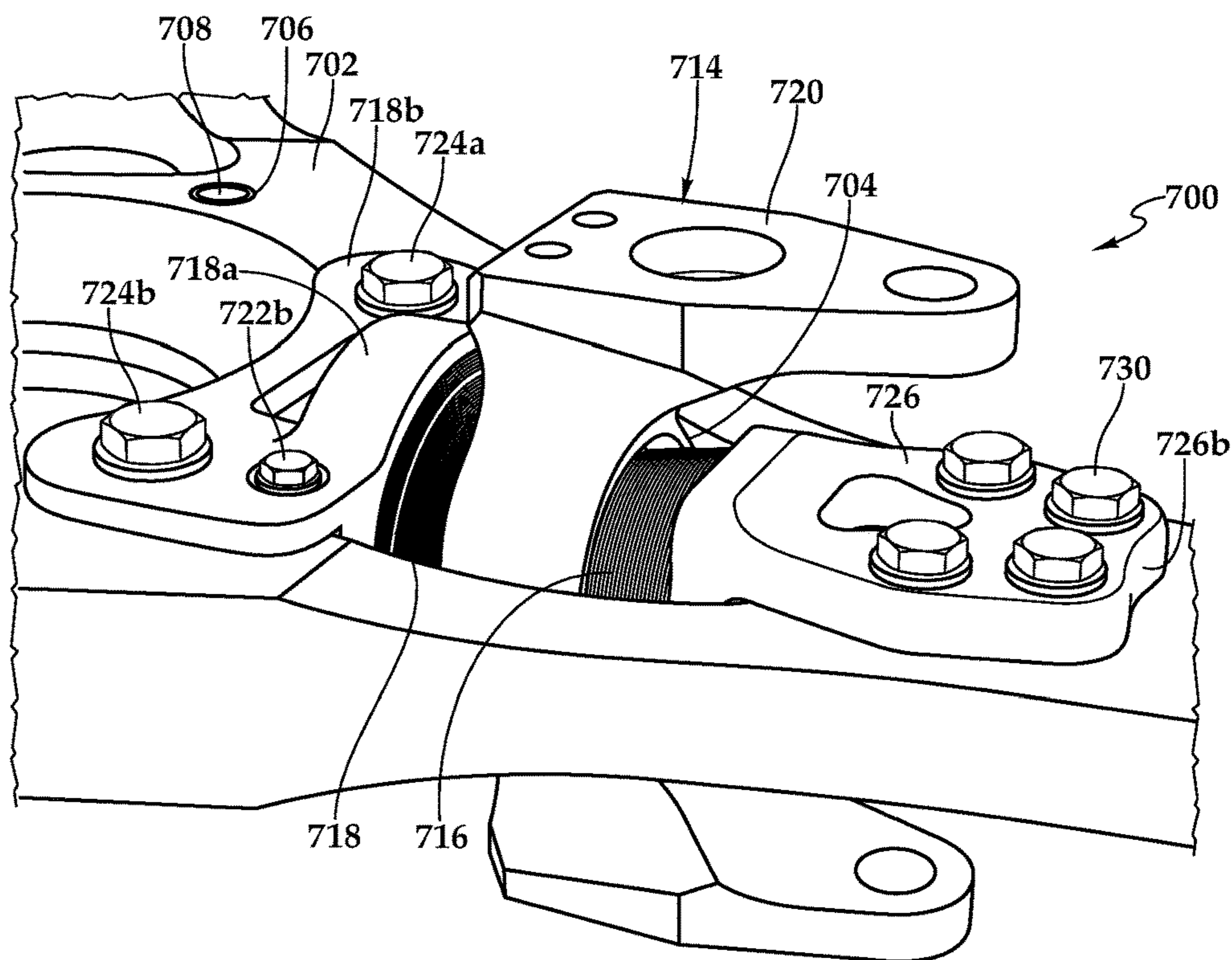


Fig.9A

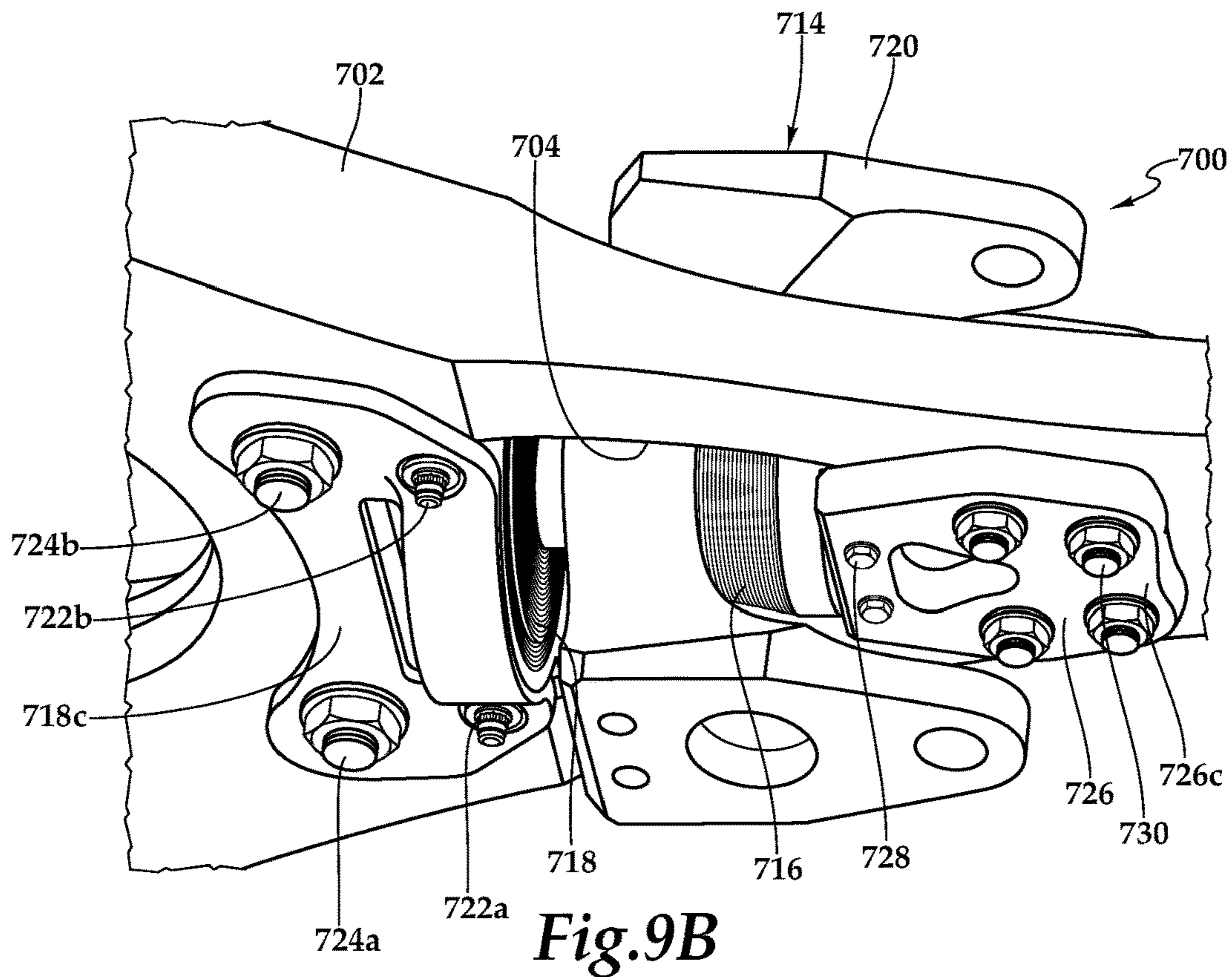


Fig.9B

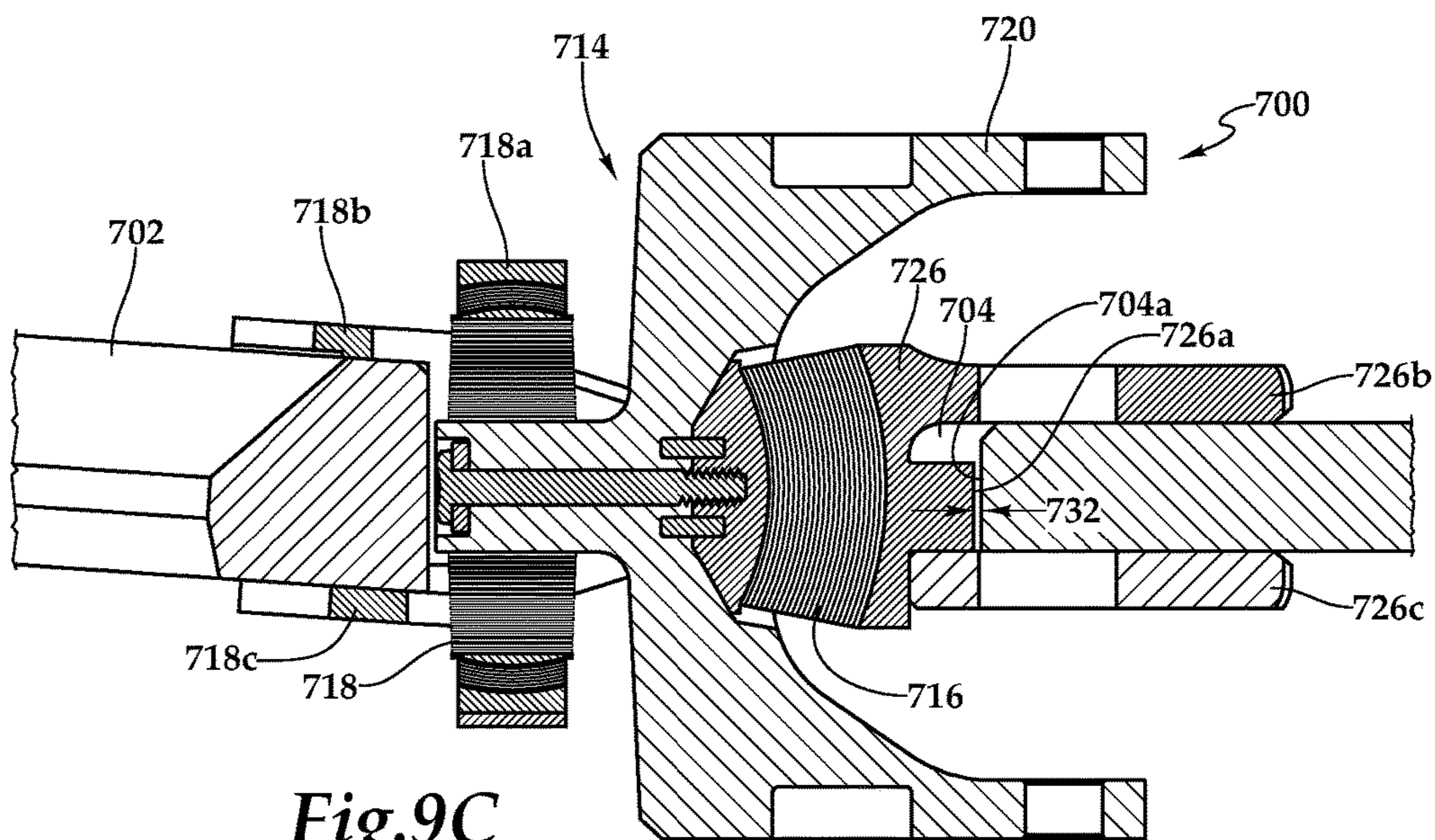


Fig.9C

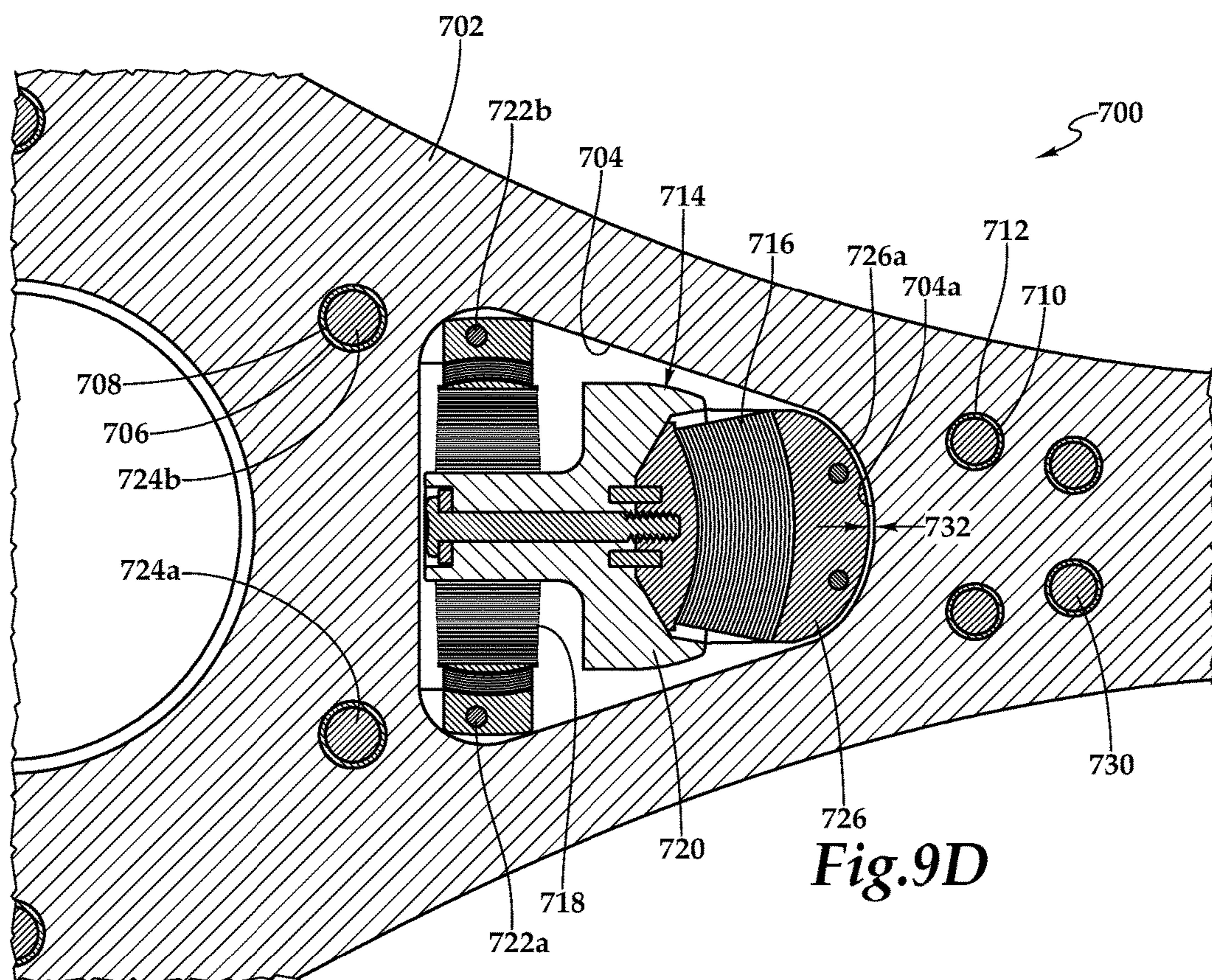


Fig.9D

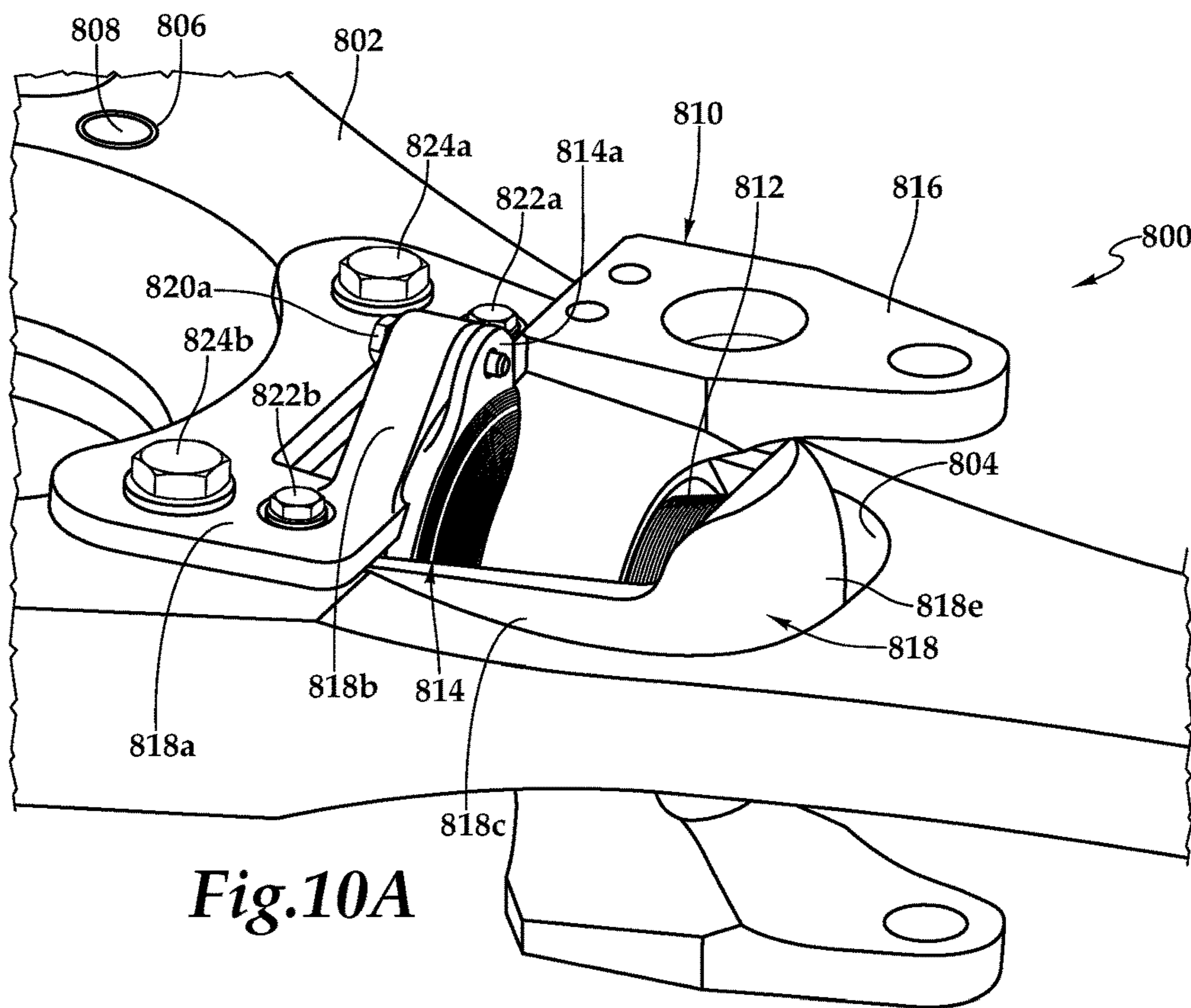


Fig.10A

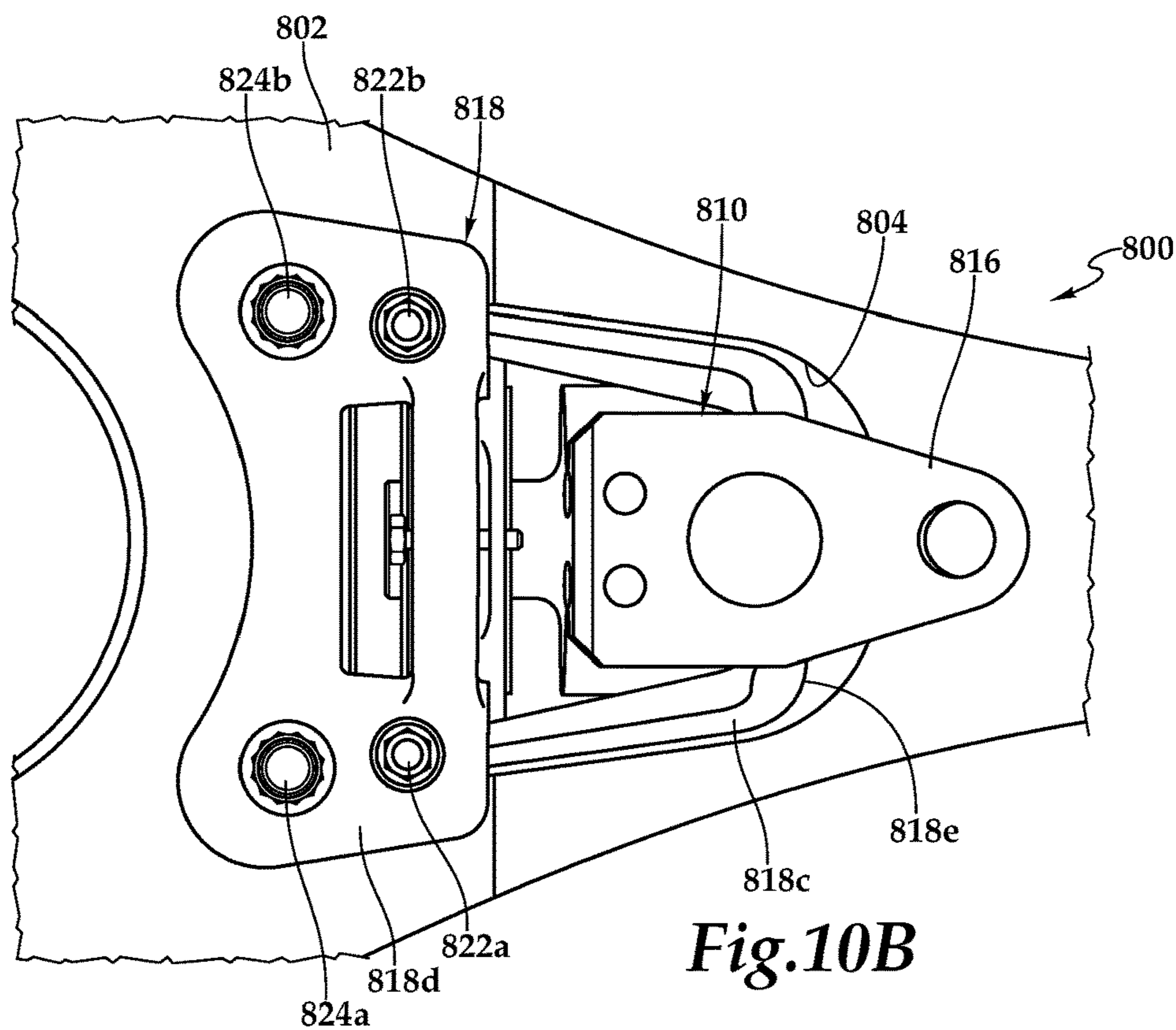


Fig.10B

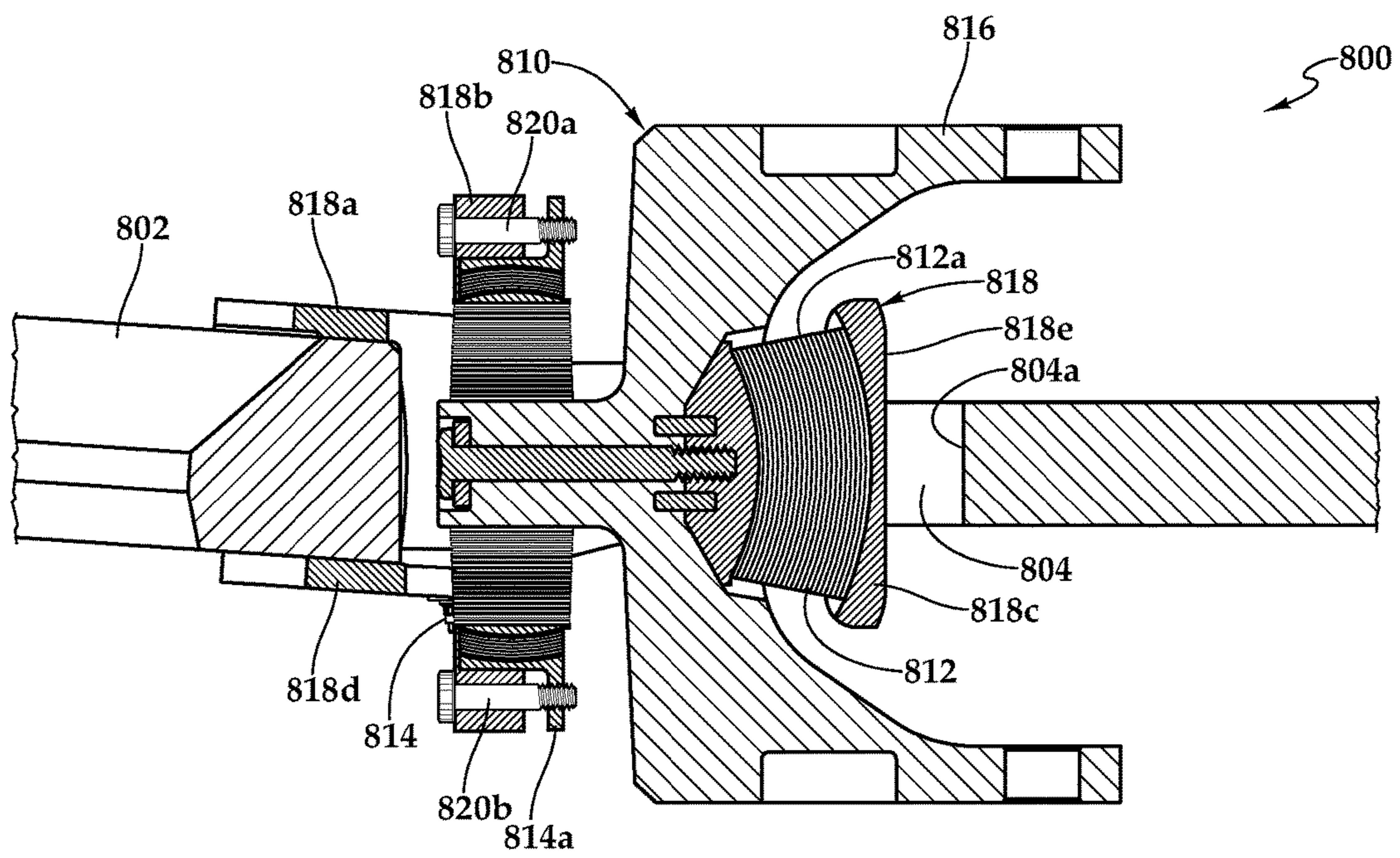


Fig.10C

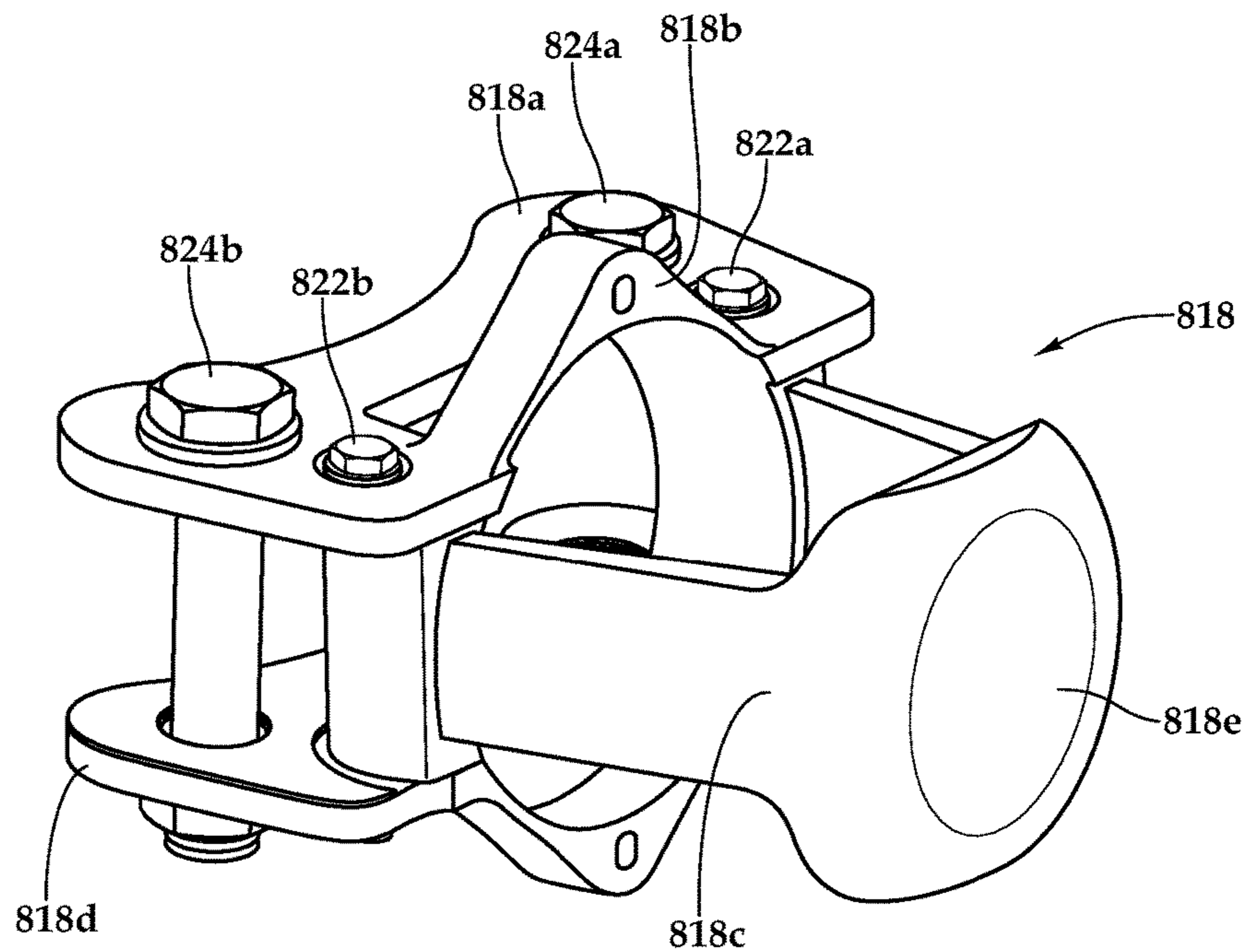


Fig.10D

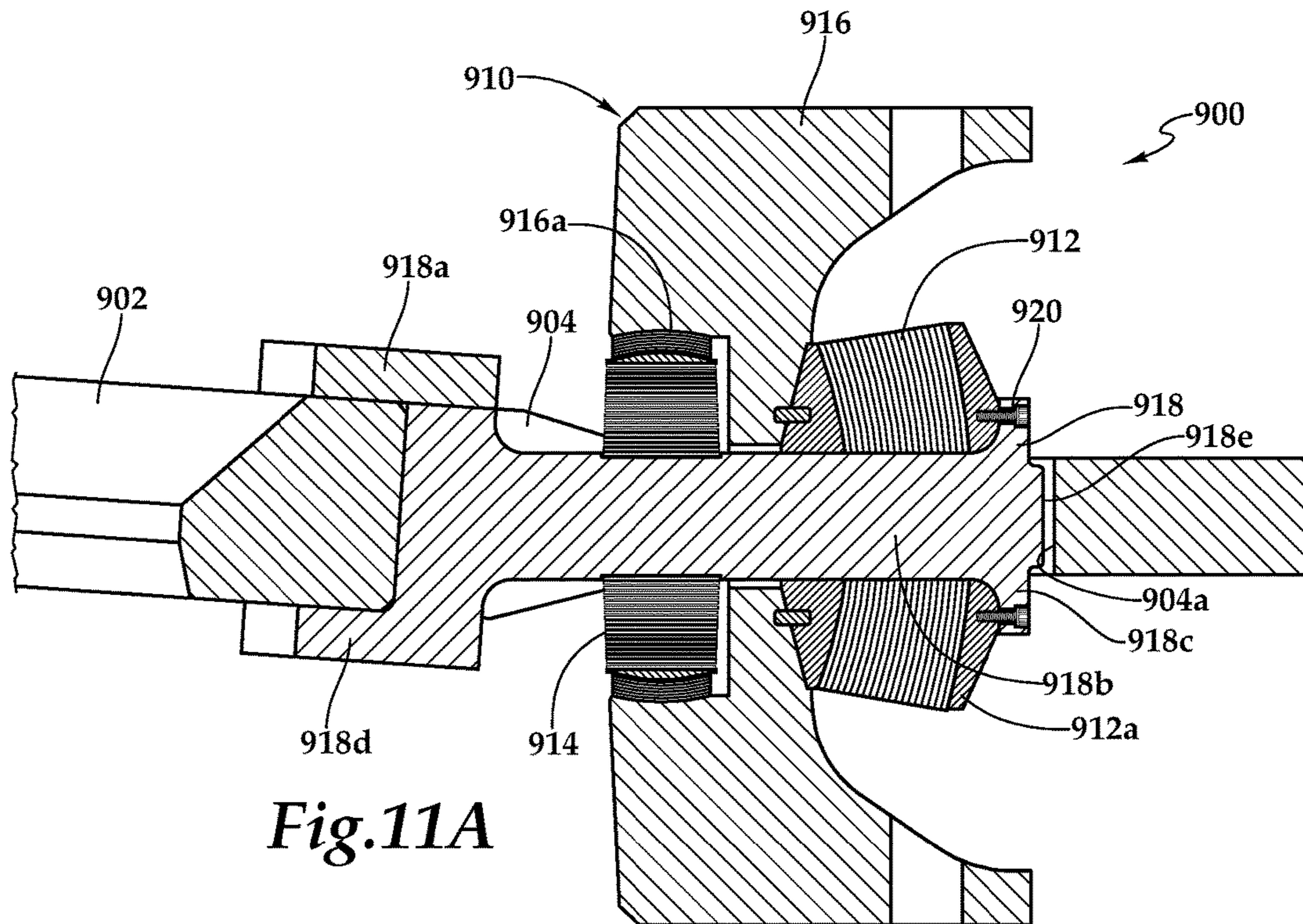


Fig. 11A

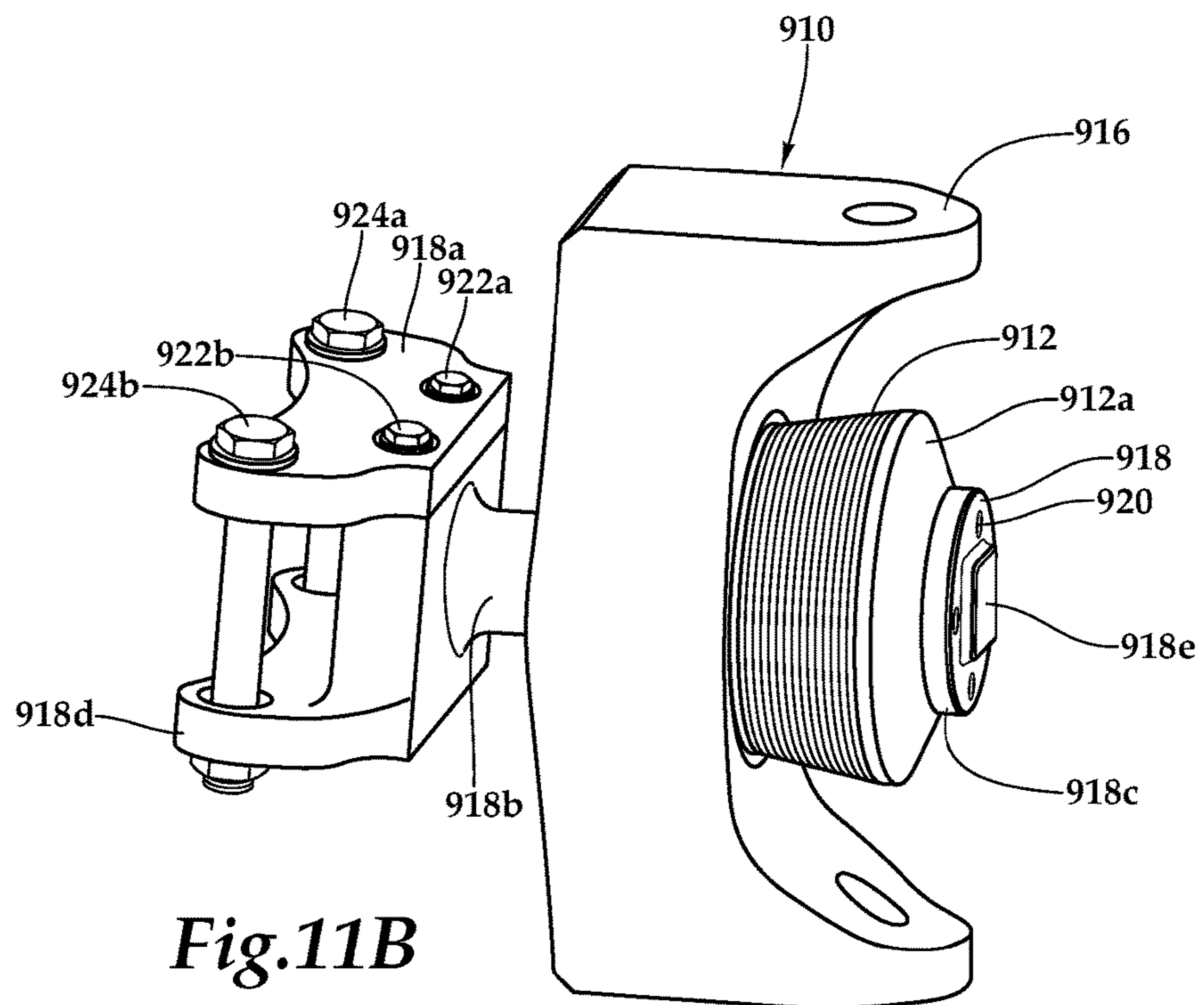


Fig. 11B

INBOARD BEARING ASSEMBLIES WITH IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This is a continuation-in-part of co-pending application Ser. No. 15/648,650 filed Jul. 13, 2017, the entire contents of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure relates, in general, to proprotor systems operable for use on tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter flight mode and an airplane flight mode and, in particular, to bearing assemblies with improved accessibility that are disposed in inboard pockets of a yoke for use in stiff-in-plane proprotor systems.

BACKGROUND

Tiltrotor aircraft typically include multiple propulsion assemblies that are positioned near outboard ends of a fixed wing. Each propulsion assembly may include an engine and transmission that provide torque and rotational energy to a drive shaft that rotates a proprotor system including a hub assembly and a plurality of proprotor blades. Typically, at least a portion of each propulsion assembly is rotatable relative to the fixed wing such that the proprotor blades have a generally horizontal plane of rotation providing vertical lift for takeoff, hovering and landing, much like a conventional helicopter, and a generally vertical plane of rotation providing forward thrust for cruising in forward flight with the fixed wing providing lift, much like a conventional propeller driven airplane. In addition, tiltrotor aircraft can be operated in configurations between the helicopter flight mode and the airplane flight mode, which may be referred to as conversion flight mode.

Physical structures have natural frequencies of vibration that can be excited by forces applied thereto as a result of operating parameters and/or environmental conditions. These frequencies are determined, at least in part, by the materials and geometrical dimensions of the structures. In the case of tiltrotor aircraft, certain structures having critical natural frequencies include the fuselage, the fixed wing and various elements of the propulsion assemblies. One important operating parameter of a tiltrotor aircraft is the angular velocity or revolutions per minute (RPM) of the proprotor blades, which may generate excitation frequencies corresponding to 1/rev (1 per revolution), 2/rev, 3/rev, etc. In general, proprotor systems for tiltrotor aircraft should be designed to achieve blade flap or out-of-plane frequencies and lead-lag or in-plane frequencies that are sufficiently distant from these excitation frequencies. For example, certain tiltrotor aircraft have stiff-in-plane proprotor systems with the lead-lag frequency above 1.0/rev, such as between 1.4/rev and 1.6/rev. For each proprotor blade, such stiff-in-plane proprotor systems have utilized three independent shear bearings in series and a centrifugal force bearing positioned outboard of the yoke and within the proprotor blade. It has been found, however, that this design prevents heat dissipation from the centrifugal force bearings during operations. In addition, this design precludes visual inspection of the centrifugal force bearings without blade removal. Further, this design obstructs compact blade fold options that can reduce the overall tiltrotor aircraft footprint during storage.

SUMMARY

In a first aspect, the present disclosure is directed to a proprotor system for a tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter flight mode and an airplane flight mode. The proprotor system includes a yoke having a plurality of blade arms each having an inboard pocket. Each of a plurality of bearing assemblies is disposed at least partially within one of the inboard pockets with each bearing assembly including a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing. Each of a plurality of inboard beams is disposed at least partially between one of the centrifugal force bearings and one of the shear bearings. Each of a plurality of proprotor blades is coupled to one of the inboard beams. Each of a plurality of latch assemblies selectively couples one of the bearing assemblies to the yoke with the latch assemblies rotatable relative to the yoke between engaged and disengaged positions. In the engaged position, each latch assembly is engagable with one of the bearing assemblies to couple the respective bearing assembly to the yoke. In the disengaged position, each latch assembly is disengaged from the respective bearing assembly enabling installation and removal of the respective bearing assembly relative to the respective pocket.

In some embodiments, the yoke may have first and second surfaces and each blade arm may define a pair of hub bolt openings passing through the yoke inboard of the inboard pocket. Each of a plurality of flanges may be coupled to one of the shear bearings, may have a contact relationship with the first surface of the yoke and may include a pair of bearing bolt openings. Each of the latch assemblies may include a clamp plate coupled to the second surface of the yoke and a pair of cam latches coupled to and rotatable relative to the first surface of the yoke. In the engaged position, respective cam latches and clamp plates are coupled to respective flanges. In certain embodiments, each clamp plate may have a pair of hub bolt openings and a pair of bearing bolt openings, each flange may have a pair of bearing bolt openings and each cam latch may have a hub bolt opening and a bearing bolt opening. In such embodiments, a plurality of hub bolts may pass through aligned hub bolt openings of respective cam latches, the yoke and respective clamp plates to couple the latch assemblies to the yoke. Also, in such embodiments, each cam latch may be rotatable about the respective hub bolt between the engaged and disengaged positions enabling installation and removal of the respective bearing assembly relative to the respective pocket without removal of the respective hub bolts when the respective latch assembly is in the disengaged position. In some embodiments, a plurality of bearing bolts may pass through aligned bearing bolt openings of respective cam latches, respective flanges and respective clamp plates to couple the bearing assemblies to the yoke when the latch assemblies are in the engaged position.

In certain embodiments, the centrifugal force bearing of each bearing assembly may be positioned outboard of the shear bearing. In some embodiments, the centrifugal force bearings may have a series of spherical elastomeric layers separated by inelastic shims. In certain embodiments, the shear bearing may include a radially inwardly disposed journal bearing coupled to the inboard beam and a radially outwardly disposed spherical bearing providing a tilting degree of freedom for the inboard beam relative to the yoke. In some embodiments, the yoke may have at least three blade arms.

In a second aspect, the present disclosure is directed to a proprotor system for a tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter

flight mode and an airplane flight mode. The proprotor system includes a yoke having a plurality of blade arms each having an inboard pocket. Each of a plurality of hub bolts extends through the yoke inboard of the inboard pockets. Each of a plurality of bearing assemblies is disposed at least partially within one of the inboard pockets with each bearing assembly including a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing having a flange. Each of a plurality of inboard beams is disposed at least partially between one of the centrifugal force bearings and one of the shear bearings. Each of a plurality of proprotor blades is coupled to one of the inboard beams. Each of a plurality of latch assemblies includes a clamp plate coupled to a first side of the yoke and a pair of cam latches coupled to a second side yoke by respective hub bolts with each cam latch selectively rotatable relative to the yoke about the respective hub bolt between engaged and disengaged positions. In the engaged position, each cam latch is coupled to the flange of one of the shear bearings and the respective clamp plate to couple the respective bearing assembly to the yoke. In the disengaged position, each cam latch is uncoupled from the respective flange and the respective clamp plate enabling installation and removal of the respective bearing assembly relative to the respective pocket without removal of the respective hub bolts.

In a third aspect, the present disclosure is directed to a tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter flight mode and an airplane flight mode. The tiltrotor aircraft includes a fuselage, a wing extending from the fuselage and first and second pylon assemblies coupled to the wing outboard of the fuselage. First and second proprotor systems are operably associated respectively with the first and second pylon assemblies with each proprotor system including a yoke having a plurality of blade arms each having an inboard pocket. Each of a plurality of bearing assemblies is disposed at least partially within one of the inboard pockets with each bearing assembly including a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing. Each of a plurality of inboard beams is disposed at least partially between one of the centrifugal force bearings and one of the shear bearings. Each of a plurality of proprotor blades is coupled to one of the inboard beams. Each of a plurality of latch assemblies selectively couples one of the bearing assemblies to the yoke with the latch assemblies rotatable relative to the yoke between engaged and disengaged positions. In the engaged position, each latch assembly is engagable with one of the bearing assemblies to couple the respective bearing assembly to the yoke. In the disengaged position, each latch assembly is disengaged from the respective bearing assembly enabling installation and removal of the respective bearing assembly relative to the respective pocket.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the features and advantages of the present disclosure, reference is now made to the detailed description along with the accompanying figures in which corresponding numerals in the different figures refer to corresponding parts and in which:

FIGS. 1A-1B are schematic illustrations of a tiltrotor aircraft in an airplane flight mode and a helicopter flight mode, respectively, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 2A-2D are various views of a proprotor system having bearing assemblies disposed in inboard pockets of a yoke in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 3A-3D are various views of a bearing assembly disposed in an inboard pocket of a yoke for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 3E is an isometric view of a bearing assembly for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 4A-4C are various views of a bearing assembly and component parts thereof for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 5A-5D are various views of a bearing assembly and component parts thereof for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 6A-6D are various views of a bearing assembly and component parts thereof for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 7A-7D are various views of a bearing assembly disposed in an inboard pocket of a yoke for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 8A-8C are various views of a bearing assembly disposed in an inboard pocket of a yoke for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 9A-9D are various views of a bearing assembly disposed in an inboard pocket of a yoke for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGS. 10A-10C are various views of a bearing assembly disposed in an inboard pocket of a yoke for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 10D is an isometric view of a bearing cage of a bearing assembly for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 11A is a cross sectional view of a bearing assembly disposed in an inboard pocket of a yoke for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure; and

FIG. 11B is an isometric view of a bearing assembly for a proprotor system in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

While the making and using of various embodiments of the present disclosure are discussed in detail below, it should be appreciated that the present disclosure provides many applicable inventive concepts, which can be embodied in a wide variety of specific contexts. The specific embodiments discussed herein are merely illustrative and do not delimit the scope of the present disclosure. In the interest of clarity, not all features of an actual implementation may be described in the present disclosure. It will of course be appreciated that in the development of any such actual embodiment, numerous implementation-specific decisions must be made to achieve the developer's specific goals, such as compliance with system-related and business-related constraints, which will vary from one implementation to another. Moreover, it will be appreciated that such a development effort might be complex and time-consuming but would be a routine undertaking for those of ordinary skill in the art having the benefit of this disclosure.

In the specification, reference may be made to the spatial relationships between various components and to the spatial orientation of various aspects of components as the devices are depicted in the attached drawings. However, as will be

recognized by those skilled in the art after a complete reading of the present disclosure, the devices, members, apparatuses, and the like described herein may be positioned in any desired orientation. Thus, the use of terms such as “above,” “below,” “upper,” “lower” or other like terms to describe a spatial relationship between various components or to describe the spatial orientation of aspects of such components should be understood to describe a relative relationship between the components or a spatial orientation of aspects of such components, respectively, as the device described herein may be oriented in any desired direction. As used herein, the term “coupled” may include direct or indirect coupling by any means, including moving and/or non-moving mechanical connections.

Referring to FIGS. 1A and 1B in the drawings, a tiltrotor aircraft is schematically illustrated and generally designated **10**. Aircraft **10** includes a fuselage **12**, a wing mount assembly **14** that is rotatable relative to fuselage **12** and a tail assembly **16** having control surfaces operable for horizontal and/or vertical stabilization during forward flight. A wing **18** is supported by wing mount assembly **14** and rotates with wing mount assembly **14** relative to fuselage **12** to enable tiltrotor aircraft **10** to convert to a storage configuration. Together, fuselage **12**, tail assembly **16** and wing **18** as well as their various frames, longerons, stringers, bulkheads, spars, ribs, skins and the like may be considered to be the airframe of tiltrotor aircraft **10**.

Located proximate the outboard ends of wing **18** are fixed nacelles **20a**, **20b**, each of which may house a drive system including an engine and a fixed portion of a transmission. A pylon assembly **22a** is rotatable relative to fixed nacelle **20a** and wing **18** between a generally horizontal orientation, as best seen in FIG. 1A, a generally vertical orientation, as best seen in FIG. 1B. Pylon assembly **22a** may include a tilting portion of the transmission and a proprotor system **24a** that is rotatable responsive to torque and rotational energy provided via the drive system. Likewise, a pylon assembly **22b** is rotatable relative to fixed nacelle **20b** and wing **18** between a generally vertical orientation, as best seen in FIG. 1A, a generally horizontal orientation, as best seen in FIG. 1B. Pylon assembly **22b** may include a tilting portion of the transmission and a proprotor system **24b** that is rotatable responsive to torque and rotational energy provided via the drive system. In the illustrated embodiment, proprotor systems **24a**, **24b** each include four proprotor blades **26**. It should be understood by those having ordinary skill in the art, however, that proprotor assemblies **24a**, **24b** could alternatively have a different number of proprotor blades, either less than or greater than four. In addition, it should be understood that the position of pylon assemblies **22a**, **22b**, the angular velocity or revolutions per minute (RPM) of the proprotor systems **24a**, **24b**, the pitch of proprotor blades **26** and the like are controlled by the pilot of tiltrotor aircraft **10** and/or the flight control system to selectively control the direction, thrust and lift of tiltrotor aircraft **10** during flight.

FIG. 1A illustrates tiltrotor aircraft **10** in a forward flight mode or airplane flight mode, in which proprotor systems **24a**, **24b** are positioned to rotate in a substantially vertical plane to provide a forward thrust while a lifting force is supplied by wing **18** such that tiltrotor aircraft **10** flies much like a conventional propeller driven aircraft. FIG. 1B illustrates tiltrotor aircraft **10** in a vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) flight mode or helicopter flight mode, in which proprotor systems **24a**, **24b** are positioned to rotate in a substantially horizontal plane to provide a vertical lift such that tiltrotor aircraft **10** flies much like a conventional helicopter. During operation, tiltrotor aircraft **10** may con-

vert from helicopter flight mode to airplane flight mode following vertical takeoff and may convert back to helicopter flight mode from airplane flight mode for hover and vertical landing. In addition, tiltrotor aircraft **10** can perform certain flight maneuvers with proprotor systems **24a**, **24b** positioned between airplane flight mode and helicopter flight mode, which can be referred to as conversion flight mode.

Each fixed nacelle **20a**, **20b** may house a drive system including an engine and transmission for supplying torque and rotational energy to a respective proprotor system **24a**, **24b**. In such embodiments, the drive systems of each fixed nacelle **20a**, **20b** may be coupled together via one or more drive shafts located in wing **18** such that either drive system can serve as a backup to the other drive system in the event of a failure. Alternatively or additionally, a drive system including an engine and transmission may be located in fuselage **12** for providing torque and rotational energy to both proprotor systems **24a**, **24b** via one or more drive shafts located in wing **18**. In tiltrotor aircraft having drive systems in both the nacelles and the fuselage, the fuselage mounted drive system may serve as a backup in the event of failure of either or both of the nacelle mounted drive systems.

In general, proprotor systems for tiltrotor aircraft should be designed to achieve blade flap or out-of-plane frequencies and lead-lag or in-plane frequencies that are sufficiently distant from the excitation frequencies generated by the proprotor systems corresponding to 1/rev (1 per revolution), 2/rev, 3/rev, etc. As an example, if a proprotor system has an operating speed of 360 RPM, the corresponding 1/rev excitation frequency is 6 Hertz (360/60=6 Hz). Similarly, the corresponding 2/rev excitation frequency is 12 Hz and the corresponding 3/rev excitation frequency is 18 Hz. It should be understood by those having ordinary skill in the art that a change in the operating speed of a proprotor system will result in a proportional change in the excitation frequencies generated by the proprotor system. For tiltrotor aircraft, operating in airplane flight mode typically requires less thrust than operating in helicopter flight mode. One way to reduce thrust as well as increase endurance, reduce noise levels and reduce fuel consumption is to reduce the operating speed of the proprotor systems. For example, in helicopter flight mode, the tiltrotor aircraft may operate at 100 percent of design RPM, but in airplane flight mode, the tiltrotor aircraft may operate at a reduced percent of design RPM such as between about 80 percent and about 90 percent of design RPM. Thus, to achieve desirable rotor dynamics, the proprotor systems for tiltrotor aircraft should be designed to avoid the frequencies of 1/rev, 2/rev, 3/rev, etc. for both helicopter flight mode and airplane flight mode operations.

In the illustrated embodiment, each proprotor system **24a**, **24b** includes four proprotor blades **26** that are positioned circumferentially about a hub assembly at ninety-degree intervals. Proprotor blades **26** and the hub assembly are preferably designed to have sufficient stiffness to achieve a first-in-plane frequency above 1.0/rev. In some embodiments, the first in-plane frequency of proprotor blades **26** may preferably be in a range between about 1.2/rev and about 1.8/rev and more preferably in a range between about 1.4/rev and about 1.6/rev. As another example, proprotor blades **26** and the hub assembly may be designed to have sufficient stiffness to achieve a first-in-plane frequency above 2.0/rev. For example, the first in-plane frequency of proprotor blades **26** may be in a range between about 2.0/rev and about 3.0/rev. In such embodiments, the first in-plane frequency of proprotor blades **26** may preferably be in a

range between about 2.2/rev and about 2.8/rev and more preferably in a range between about 2.4/rev and about 2.6/rev.

The desired proprotor blade stiffness and/or stiffness to mass ratio of the present embodiments is achieved using, for example, carbon-based materials for the structural components of proprotor blades **26** such as graphite-based materials, graphene-based materials or other carbon allotropes including carbon nanostructure-based materials such as materials including single-walled and multi-walled carbon nanotubes. In one example, the spar and/or skin of proprotor blades **26** are preferably monolithic structures formed using a broad goods and/or layered tape construction process having a manual or automated layup of a plurality of composite broad goods material layers including carbon fabrics, carbon tapes and combinations thereof, positioned over one or more mandrels having simple geometric surfaces with smooth transitions. After curing and other processing steps, the material layers form a high strength, lightweight solid composite members. In this process, the material thicknesses of the components can be tailoring spanwise and chordwise to the desired stiffness and/or stiffness to mass ratio. The proprotor blade components may be composed of up to about 50 percent, about 60 percent, about 70 percent, about 80 percent, about 90 percent or more of the carbon-based material or materials.

Referring next to FIGS. 2A-2D in the drawings, a proprotor system for tiltrotor aircraft is depicted and generally designated **100**. In the illustrated embodiment, proprotor system **100** includes a hub assembly **102** including a yoke **104** that is coupled to a mast **106** via a constant velocity joint assembly **108**. Hub assembly **102** rotates with mast **106**, which is coupled to a drive system including an engine and transmission of the tiltrotor aircraft that provides torque and rotational energy to proprotor system **100**. Constant velocity joint assembly **108** provides a gimbaling degree of freedom for yoke **104** relative to mast **106** enabling yoke **104** to teeter in any direction relative to the rotational axis **110** of proprotor system **100**. Accordingly, hub assembly **102** may be referred to as a gimbaled hub. In the illustrated implementation, constant velocity joint assembly **108** is positioned above the rotational plane of yoke **104** and is mounted on and/or coupled to an upper surface of yoke **104** using a plurality of hub bolts, such as hub bolts **102a**, **102b**, that pass through hub bolt openings of constant velocity joint assembly **108** and yoke **104**, as best seen in FIG. 2C. As illustrated, yoke **104** includes four blade arms each of which holds and supports a proprotor blade **112**. Each proprotor blade **112** includes a spar **114** that extends spanwise toward the tip of proprotor blade **112**. Spars **114** are preferably the main structural members of proprotor blades **112** designed to carry the primary centrifugal and bending loads of proprotor blades **112**. Spars **114** may have a root-to-tip twist on the order of about 30 degrees to about 40 degrees or other suitable root-to-tip twist.

Each spar **114** has a root section **116** that couples of each proprotor blade **112** with yoke **104** via an outboard shear bearing **118** and an inboard bearing assembly **120**. Each shear bearing assembly **118** is coupled to an outboard end of yoke **104** with a plurality of connecting members such as bolts, pins or the like. Likewise, each bearing assembly **120** is coupled to an inboard station of yoke **104** with a plurality of connecting members such as bolts, including the hub bolts, pins or the like. Each bearing assembly **120** includes a rotatably mounted inboard beam **122** having upper and lower arms **122a**, **122b**. As illustrated, each spar **114** is coupled to a respective inboard beam **122** at upper and lower

arms **122a**, **122b** with a plurality of connecting members such as bolts, pins or the like. In addition, each spar **114** is coupled to a respective shear bearing assembly **118** via a suitable connection (not visible).

Each proprotor blade **112** has a centrifugal force retention load path through bearing assembly **120** to yoke **104**. In the illustrated embodiment, each spar **114** includes an integral pitch horn **124** on the leading edge of spar **114** that is coupled to a leading edge pitch link **126** of a pitch control assembly **128** depicted as the rotating portion of a rise and fall swash plate operable to collectively and cyclically control the pitch of proprotor blades **112**. In other embodiments, the pitch horns may be independent components coupled to the spars, the pitch horns may be trailing edge pitch horns and/or the pitch links may be trailing edge pitch links. Each proprotor blade **112** has an independent pitch change degree of freedom relative to hub assembly **102** about a pitch change axis **130**. The pitch change of each proprotor blade **112** is controlled responsive to changes in position of pitch links **126** and pitch control assembly **128**. Rotation of each proprotor blade **112** causes the respective inboard beam **122** to rotate relative to yoke **104** about the respective pitch change axis **130**. Each proprotor blade **112** has an independent tilting degree of freedom relative to hub assembly **102** about a focal point **132** that is coincident with pitch change axis **130**. For example, each proprotor blade **112** is operable to tilt relative to hub assembly **102** with lead-lag motion, as indicated by arrow **134** in FIG. 2A, and with flapping motion, as indicated by arrow **136** in FIG. 2D.

Referring additionally to FIGS. 3A-3E in the drawings, therein are depicted various views of a proprotor system **200** of the present disclosure. Proprotor system **200** includes a yoke **202** depicted as having three blade arms each including an inboard pocket **204**. As discussed herein, a yoke of the present disclosure could have any number of blade arms corresponding to the desired number of proprotor blades in a particular implementation including yoke designs having at least three blade arms, at least four blade arms or other suitable number of blade arms. Yoke **202** may be formed from composite materials including numerous material plies composed of continuous filaments, fibers and/or sheets. The composite materials may include one or more of carbon, graphite, glass, basalt, aromatic polyamide materials or the like and any combination thereof. The material plies may be in the form of fabrics such as woven fabrics, tape such as unidirectional tape and the like. The plies may be joined together with a resin such as a polymeric matrix including thermoplastic or thermosetting resin or any suitable resin system such as epoxies, polyimides, polyamides, bismaleimides, polyesters, vinyl esters, phenolics, polyetheretherketones (PEEK), polyetherketones (PEK), polyphenylene sulfides (PPS) and the like. After curing, yoke **202** may require a variety of finishing steps including material removal processes such as machining operations to shape the surface of yoke **202** and to form inboard pockets **204** as well as other openings, such as hub bolt openings, in yoke **202**.

A bearing assembly **206** is disposed in each of the inboard pockets **204** of yoke **202**, for clarity of illustration, only one such bearing assembly **206** is shown in FIGS. 3A-3E. Bearing assembly **206** includes a centrifugal force bearing **208**, a shear bearing **210** and an inboard beam **212**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **208** includes an inboard member **208a** having a convex spherical outboard surface and an outboard member depicted as integral shoe **208b** having a concave spherical inboard surface. Disposed between inboard member **208a** and outboard member **208b** is a bearing element **208c** that includes

a series of spherical elastomeric layers separated by inelastic shims. The connections within bearing element **208c** and between bearing element **208c** and inboard member **208a** and outboard member **208b** are permanent and may be made by vulcanizing the elastomeric material of bearing element **208c** to the adjacent surfaces or by bonded, adhered or otherwise secured the elastomeric material in a non-removable manner to these surfaces. The durometer and thickness of the materials as well as the stiffness, softness and/or spring rate of centrifugal force bearing **208** may be tailored to achieve the desired operational modes based upon the loads and motions expected in the particular application. In operation, each centrifugal force bearing **208** is operable to provide a centrifugal force retention load path from a prop rotor blade **112** to yoke **202**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **208** includes a lower clamp plate **208d** that is bolted, pinned or otherwise coupled to a lower surface of outboard member **208b** once centrifugal force bearing **208** is disposed in an inboard pocket **204**. Centrifugal force bearing **208** is coupled to yoke **202** outboard of inboard pocket **204** using bolts **224** or other suitable technique.

In the illustrated embodiment, shear bearing **210** includes a radially inwardly disposed journal bearing **210a** and a radially outwardly disposed spherical bearing **210b**. Journal bearing **210a** includes a series of cylindrical elastomeric layers separated by inelastic shims. Spherical bearing **210b** includes a series of spherical elastomeric layers separated by inelastic shims. The connections within journal bearing **210a** and spherical bearing **210b** are permanent and may be made by vulcanizing the elastomeric material directly on adjacent surfaces or by bonded, adhered or otherwise secured the elastomeric material in a non-removable manner to these surfaces. The durometer and thickness of the materials as well as the stiffness, softness and/or spring rate of journal bearing **210a** and spherical bearing **210b** may be tailored to achieve the desired operational modes based upon the loads and motions expected in the particular application. In other embodiments, shear bearing **210** could be a non elastomer bearing or could include a non elastomer journal bearing and/or a non elastomer spherical incorporating, for example, one or more metal bearings. In the illustrated embodiment, shear bearing **210** includes a metal bearing ring **214a** that is preferably permanently coupled to spherical bearing **210b** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material of spherical bearing **210b** to the inner surface of bearing ring **214a**. In the illustrated embodiment, bearing ring **214a** includes a pair of oppositely disposed flanges **214c**, **214d** forming an upper clamp plate. Shear bearing **210** is coupled to yoke **202** using hub bolts **216a**, **216b** that pass through the hub bolt openings in bearing ring **214a**, yoke **202** and lower clamp plate **214b**. As best seen in FIG. 3C, hub bolts **216a**, **216b** have been foreshortened for convenience of illustration as hub bolts **216a**, **216b** would also coupled the constant velocity joint to yoke **202** as discussed herein. In the illustrated embodiment, bushings **202a**, **202b**, such as metal bushings, are positioned within the hub bolt openings of yoke **202**. Bushings **202a**, **202b** may be bonded or otherwise secured within the hub bolt openings of yoke **202**.

In the illustrated embodiment, inboard beam **212** includes upper and lower arms **212a**, **212b**. Inboard beam **212** receives centrifugal force bearing **208** in an opening **212c** such that centrifugal force bearing **208** is housed within inboard beam **212**. Centrifugal force bearing **208** includes an anti-rotation feature depicted as a boss **208e** extending radially inwardly, relative to yoke **202**, from inboard mem-

ber **208a**. Boss **208e** is received within an anti-rotation feature depicted as cavity **212d** of inboard beam **212** that extends radially inwardly, relative to yoke **202**, to couple centrifugal force bearing **208** to inboard beam **212** and prevent relative rotation therebetween. An inboard extension **212e** of inboard beam **212** is received in an opening **210c** of shear bearing **210**. In addition, an anti-rotation feature depicted as a boss **212f** of inboard extension **212e** is received within an anti-rotation feature **210d** of shear bearing **210** to couple shear bearing **210** to inboard beam **212** and prevent relative rotation therebetween. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **208** and shear bearing **210** are coupled together with a bolt **218a** and washer **218b**.

As best seen in FIG. 3E, to install a bearing assembly **206** in an inboard pocket **204** of yoke **202**, clamp plate **214b** and lower clamp plate **208d** of centrifugal force bearing **208** are removed such that the remainder of bearing assembly **206** may be lowered into an inboard pocket **204**. Once bearing assembly **206** is disposed in an inboard pocket **204** lower clamp plate **208d** may be coupled to outboard member **208b** by bolting or other suitable technique. Outboard member **208b** may now be coupled to yoke **202** by bolting or other suitable technique. In addition, clamp plates **214a**, **214b** are coupled together and clamp plates **214a**, **214b** are coupled to yoke **202** with hub bolts **216a**, **216b** that also couple the constant velocity joint assembly to yoke **202** (see for example constant velocity joint assembly **108** of FIG. 2C). These connections secure bearing assembly **206** in inboard pocket **204** of yoke **202**.

As discussed herein, a prop rotor blade is coupled to upper and lower arms **212a**, **212b** of inboard beam **212** by bolting or other suitable technique. As the prop rotor blades engage in collective and/or cyclic blade pitch operations, inboard beam **212** must rotate therewith about pitch changes axis **220**. During these rotary operations, inboard beam **212** causes inboard member **208a** of centrifugal force bearing **208** to rotate relative to outboard member **208b** due to the anti-rotation connection between inboard beam **212** and inboard member **208a** as well as the fixed connection between outboard member **208b** and yoke **202**. Also, during these rotary operations, inboard beam **212** causes rotation within journal bearing **210a** and/or between journal bearing **210a** and spherical bearing **210b** due to the anti-rotation connection between inboard beam **212** and shear bearing **210** as well as the fixed connection between shear bearing **210** and yoke **202** created by clamp plates **214a**, **214b**. Thus, a prop rotor blade coupled to bearing assembly **206** has a pitch change degree of freedom about pitch change axis **220**.

Centrifugal force bearing **208** is positioned outboard of shear bearing **210** and provides a centrifugal force retention path between a prop rotor blade and yoke **202**. As the prop rotor blades engage in blade flap or out-of-plane movements and lead-lag or in-plane movements, spherical bearing **210b** enables inboard beam **212** to tilt relative to yoke **202**. In the illustrated embodiment, inboard beam **212** is operable to tilt relative to a focal point **222** associated with the spherical elements of spherical bearing **210b**, which is preferably coincident with pitch change axis **220**. Thus, a prop rotor blade coupled to bearing assembly **206** has a tilting degree of freedom about focal point **222**.

Use of prop rotor systems having the inboard bearing assemblies of the present disclosure reduces the bearing count compared to conventional prop rotor systems. The inboard bearing assemblies of the present disclosure also dissipate heat faster than conventional centrifugal force bearings that are disposed outboard of the yoke and within the prop rotor blades. In addition, locating the bearing assem-

blies of the present disclosure in inboard stations enables visual inspection of the bearing assemblies without blade removal. Further, the inboard positioning of the bearing assemblies of the present disclosure allows for compact blade fold options that reduce the tiltrotor aircraft footprint during storage.

Referring to FIGS. 4A-4C, additional features of bearing assembly 206 will be described. The coupling between centrifugal force bearing 208 and inboard beam 212 preferably serves three important functions including providing a centrifugal force load path function, a lateral movement constraint function and an anti-rotation function. During rotary operations of an aircraft using a proprotor system of the present disclosure, the centrifugal force load generated by each proprotor blade is transferred to the yoke by a bearing assembly 206. Within each bearing assembly 206, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surfaces 208f, 208g of centrifugal force bearing 208 and mating surfaces 212g, 212h of inboard beam 212. In the illustrated embodiment, mating surfaces 208f, 208g are generally planar mating surfaces with a radial step therebetween. Likewise, mating surfaces 212g, 212h are generally planar mating surfaces with a radial step therebetween. As illustrated, mating surface 208f of centrifugal force bearing 208 has a contact relationship with corresponding mating surface 212g of inboard beam 212. Similarly, mating surface 208g of centrifugal force bearing 208 has a contact relationship with corresponding mating surface 212h of inboard beam 212. In other embodiments, certain of the mating surfaces or portions thereof could have a spaced apart relationship with a corresponding mating surface. Thus, during rotary operations of an aircraft using a proprotor system of the present disclosure, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surfaces 208f, 208g of centrifugal force bearing 208 and mating surfaces 212g, 212h of inboard beam 212.

In addition to the centrifugal forces that are generally in the radially outward direction relative to yoke 202, the components of bearing assembly 206 also experience lateral forces associated with, for example, lead-lag and/or flapping motions of a proprotor blade. As used herein, the term lateral force includes forces that are generally normal to the radial direction of the yoke and/or normal to pitch change axis 220. Such lateral forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing 208 out of concentricity with inboard beam 212. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing 208 includes a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as boss 208e that extends radially inwardly. Boss 208e is operably associated with and received within a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as cavity 212d of inboard beam 212 that extends radially inwardly. As illustrated, boss 208e and cavity 212d are each non-cylindrical features depicted as multisided geometric prism features in the form of four-sided geometric prism features. Preferably, boss 208e and cavity 212d have a close fitting relationship that prevents and/or substantially prevents relative lateral movement between centrifugal force bearing 208 and inboard beam 212 during rotary operations.

In addition to the centrifugal forces and lateral forces, the components of bearing assembly 206 also experience torsional forces associated with, for example, pitch change operations of a proprotor blade. Such torsional forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing 208 to rotate relative to inboard beam 212. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing 208 includes an anti-rotation feature depicted as boss 208e that extends radially inwardly. Boss 208e corresponds with and is received within an anti-rotation feature depicted as cavity 212d of inboard beam 212

that extends radially inwardly. As illustrated, boss 208e and cavity 212d are each non-cylindrical features depicted as multisided geometric prism features in the form of four-sided geometric prism features. Preferably, boss 208e and cavity 212d have a close fitting relationship that prevents and/or substantially prevents relative rotation between centrifugal force bearing 208 and inboard beam 212 during rotary operations. In the illustrated embodiment, the lateral movement constraint feature and the anti-rotation feature of centrifugal force bearing 208 are integral to one another.

Referring to FIGS. 5A-5D, a bearing assembly for a proprotor system is generally designated 306. As stated herein, the coupling between centrifugal force bearing 308 and inboard beam 312 preferably serves three important functions including providing a centrifugal force load path function, a lateral movement constraint function and an anti-rotation function. During rotary operations of an aircraft using a proprotor system of the present disclosure, the centrifugal force load generated by each proprotor blade is transferred to the yoke by a bearing assembly 306. Within each bearing assembly 306, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surfaces 308f, 308g of centrifugal force bearing 308 and mating surfaces 312g, 312h of inboard beam 312. In the illustrated embodiment, mating surfaces 308f, 308g are generally planar mating surfaces with a radial step therebetween. Likewise, mating surfaces 312g, 312h are generally planar mating surfaces with a radial step therebetween. As illustrated, mating surface 308f of centrifugal force bearing 308 has a contact relationship with corresponding mating surface 312g of inboard beam 312. Similarly, mating surface 308g of centrifugal force bearing 308 has a contact relationship with corresponding mating surface 312h of inboard beam 312. Thus, during rotary operations of an aircraft using a proprotor system of the present disclosure, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surfaces 308f, 308g of centrifugal force bearing 308 and mating surfaces 312g, 312h of inboard beam 312.

In addition to the centrifugal forces that are generally in the radially outward direction relative to yoke 202, the components of bearing assembly 306 also experience lateral forces associated with, for example, lead-lag and/or flapping motions of a proprotor blade. Such lateral forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing 308 out of concentricity with inboard beam 312. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing 308 includes a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as boss 308e that extends radially inwardly. Boss 308e is operably associated with and received within a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as cavity 312d of inboard beam 312 that extends radially inwardly. As illustrated, boss 308e and cavity 312d are each cylindrical features. Preferably, boss 308e and cavity 312d have a close fitting relationship that prevents and/or substantially prevents relative lateral movement between centrifugal force bearing 308 and inboard beam 312 during rotary operations.

In addition to the centrifugal forces and lateral forces, the components of bearing assembly 306 also experience torsional forces associated with, for example, pitch change operations of a proprotor blade. Such torsional forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing 308 to rotate relative to inboard beam 312. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing 308 includes an anti-rotation feature depicted as a plurality of sockets 308h that extend radially outwardly. Sockets 308h correspond with an anti-rotation feature depicted as sockets 312i of inboard beam 312 that extend radially inwardly. As best seen in FIG. 5A, a plurality of pins 320 extend into corresponding sockets 308h of

centrifugal force bearing **308** and sockets **312i** of inboard beam **312** to prevent and/or substantially prevent relative rotation between centrifugal force bearing **308** and inboard beam **312** during rotary operations. In the illustrated embodiment, the lateral movement constraint feature and the anti-rotation feature of centrifugal force bearing **308** are independent of one another. Even though centrifugal force bearing **308** and inboard beam **312** are depicted as having a particular number of anti-rotation sockets **308h**, **312i**, in a particular arrangement, it should be understood by those having ordinary skill in the art that the centrifugal force bearings and inboard beams of the present disclosure could have any number of anti-rotation sockets both greater than or less than four that are arranged in any desired orientation including having uniform or nonuniform circumferential orientations, uniform or non-uniform socket depths, uniform or non-uniform socket diameters and/or uniform or non-uniform distances from the pitch change axis.

Referring to FIGS. 6A-6D, a bearing assembly for a proprotor system is generally designated **406**. As stated herein, the coupling between a centrifugal force bearing **408** and an inboard beam **412** preferably serves three important functions including providing a centrifugal force load path function, a lateral movement constraint function and an anti-rotation function. During rotary operations of an aircraft using a proprotor system of the present disclosure, the centrifugal force load generated by each proprotor blade is transferred to the yoke by a bearing assembly **406**. Within each bearing assembly **406**, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surfaces **408f**, **408g** of centrifugal force bearing **408** and mating surfaces **412g**, **412h** of inboard beam **412**. In the illustrated embodiment, mating surface **408f** is a generally conical mating surface and mating surface **408g** is a generally planar mating surface. Likewise, mating surface **412g** is a generally conical mating surface and mating surface **412h** is a generally planar mating surface. As illustrated, mating surface **408f** of centrifugal force bearing **408** has a contact relationship with corresponding mating surface **412g** of inboard beam **412**. As best seen in FIG. 6A, mating surface **408g** of centrifugal force bearing **408** has a spaced apart relationship with corresponding mating surface **412h** of inboard beam **412**. Thus, during rotary operations of an aircraft using a proprotor system of the present disclosure, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surface **408f** of centrifugal force bearing **408** and mating surface **412g** of inboard beam **412**.

In addition to the centrifugal forces that are generally in the radially outward direction relative to yoke **202**, the components of bearing assembly **406** also experience lateral forces associated with, for example, lead-lag and/or flapping motions of a proprotor blade. Such lateral forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing **408** out of concentricity with inboard beam **412**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **408** includes a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as mating surface **408f** that extends radially inwardly. Mating surface **408f** is operably associated with and received within a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as mating surface **412g** of inboard beam **412** that extends radially inwardly. As illustrated, mating surface **408f** and mating surface **412g** are each conical features that provide a self-aligning interface between centrifugal force bearing **408** and inboard beam **412** that prevents and/or substantially prevents relative lateral movement between centrifugal force bearing **408** and inboard beam **412** during rotary operations.

In addition to the centrifugal forces and lateral forces, the components of bearing assembly **406** also experience tor-

sional forces associated with, for example, pitch change operations of a proprotor blade. Such torsional forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing **408** to rotate relative to inboard beam **412**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **408** includes an anti-rotation feature depicted as a plurality of sockets **408h** that extend radially outwardly. Sockets **408h** correspond with an anti-rotation feature depicted as sockets **412i** of inboard beam **412** that extend radially inwardly. As best seen in FIG. 6A, a plurality of pins **420** extend into corresponding sockets **408h** of centrifugal force bearing **408** and sockets **412i** of inboard beam **412** to prevent and/or substantially prevent relative rotation between centrifugal force bearing **408** and inboard beam **412** during rotary operations. In the illustrated embodiment, the lateral movement constraint feature and the anti-rotation feature of centrifugal force bearing **408** are independent of one another.

Referring next to FIGS. 7A-7D in the drawings, therein are depicted various views of a proprotor system **500** of the present disclosure. Proprotor system **500** includes a yoke **502** depicted as having three blade arms each including an inboard pocket **504** and a pair of hub bolt openings **506** each having a bushing **508** secured therein. A bearing assembly **510** is disposed in each of the inboard pockets **504** of yoke **502**, for clarity of illustration, only one such bearing assembly **510** is shown in FIGS. 7A-7D. Bearing assembly **510** includes a centrifugal force bearing **512**, a shear bearing **514** and an inboard beam **516**. As best seen in FIG. 7C, centrifugal force bearing **512** has is a bearing element **512a**, an integral shoe **512b** that includes an upper clamp plate **512c** and an independent lower clamp plate **512d**. Preferably, the connection between bearing element **512a** and integral shoe **512b** is permanent and may be made by vulcanizing the elastomeric material of bearing element **512a** to the adjacent surface of integral shoe **512b** or by bonded, adhered or otherwise secured the elastomeric material in a non-removable manner to integral shoe **512b**. Lower clamp plate **512d** is independent of integral shoe **512b** to enable installation and removal of bearing assembly **510** relative to inboard pocket **504** of yoke **502**. In the installed orientation, lower clamp plate **512d** is coupled to upper clamp plate **512c** by one or more bolts **518** which also couple centrifugal force bearing **512** to yoke **502** outboard of inboard pocket **504**.

In the illustrated embodiment, shear bearing **514** includes a metal bearing ring **514a** that is preferably permanently coupled to an elastomer element of shear bearing **514** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material to the inner surface of bearing ring **514a**. In the illustrated embodiment, bearing ring **514a** includes a pair of oppositely disposed flanges **514b**, **514c** forming an upper clamp plate. Shear bearing **514** is selectively coupled to yoke **502** using a latch assembly **516**. In the illustrated embodiment, latch assembly **516** includes a lower clamp plate **516a** and a pair of cam latches **516b**, **516c**. Lower clamp plate **516a** is coupled to cam latches **516b**, **516c** respectively by hub bolts **518a**, **518b**. As described above, hub bolts **518a**, **518b** have been foreshortened for convenience of illustration as hub bolts **518a**, **518b** would also coupled the constant velocity joint to yoke **502**. It is noted that one or more of the components of bearing assembly **510** may need inspection, maintenance and/or replacement on a periodic basis. The procedure for such operations may be complicated by the need to remove the hub bolts and the other associated hub components, such as the constant velocity joint, from the yoke **502** to simply inspection or replace a single bearing assembly **510**. In the present embodiment, however, bearing assemblies **510** have

improved access for installation, removal and inspections due to the operation of latch assemblies **516**.

In the illustrated embodiment, latch assembly **516** has an engaged position depicted in FIGS. **7A**, **7C**, **7D** and a disengaged position depicted in FIG. **7B**. More specifically, cam latch **516b** is rotatable relative to yoke **502** about hub bolt **518a** between the engaged and disengaged positions, as seen in the comparison between FIGS. **7A** and **7B**. Likewise, cam latch **516c** is rotatable relative to yoke **502** about hub bolt **518b** between the engaged and disengaged positions, also seen in the comparison between FIGS. **7A** and **7B**. In the engaged position, bearing bolts **520a**, **520b** may pass through aligned bearing bolt openings of respective cam latches **516b**, **516c**, respective flanges **514b**, **514c** and lower clamp plate **516a** to couple bearing assembly **510** to yoke **502** with flanges **514b**, **514c** having a contact relationship with an upper surface of yoke **504** and lower clamp plate **516a** having a contact relationship with a lower surface of yoke **504**.

To gain access to bearing assembly **510**, bearing bolts **520a**, **520b** may be removed from bearing assembly **510** such that cam latches **516b**, **516c** may be rotated relative to yoke **502** about hub bolts **518a**, **518b** from the engaged position of FIG. **7A** to the disengaged position of FIG. **7B** enabling inspection, installation and removal of bearing assembly **510** relative to inboard pocket **504** without removal of hub bolts **518a**, **518b**, thereby alleviating the complications associated therewith. Thus, in both the engaged and disengaged positions of latch assembly **516**, hub bolts **518a**, **518b** remain in place passing through aligned hub bolt openings of cam latches **516b**, **516c**, yoke **502** and clamp plate **516a**. In certain implementations, it may be desirable to loosen hub bolts **518a**, **518b** when operating of cam latches **516b**, **516c** between the engaged and disengaged positions.

Referring next to FIGS. **8A-8C** in the drawings, therein are depicted various views of a proprotor system **600** of the present disclosure. Proprotor system **600** includes a yoke **602** depicted as having three blade arms each including an inboard pocket **604** having a load transfer surface **604a**. Load transfer surface **604a** has an arcuate profile such as a circular arc profile or an elliptical arc profile. In addition, each blade arm includes a pair of hub bolt openings **606** each having a bushing **608** secured therein and a pair of shoe bolt openings **610** each having a bushing **612** secured therein. A bearing assembly **614** is disposed in each of the inboard pockets **604** of yoke **602**, for clarity of illustration, only one such bearing assembly **614** is shown in FIGS. **8A-8C**. Bearing assembly **614** includes a centrifugal force bearing **616**, a shear bearing **618**, an inboard beam **620** and an independent shoe **622**. In the illustrated embodiment, shear bearing **618** includes a metal bearing ring **618a** that is preferably permanently coupled to an elastomer element of shear bearing **618** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material to the inner surface of bearing ring **618a**. In the illustrated embodiment, bearing ring **618a** is coupled to an upper clamp plate **624a** and a lower clamp plate **624b** using screws **626a**, **626b**. Upper and lower clamp plates **624a**, **624b** are coupled to yoke **602** by hub bolts **628a**, **628b**. As described above, hub bolts **628a**, **628b** have been foreshortened for convenience of illustration as hub bolts **628a**, **628b** would also coupled the constant velocity joint to yoke **602**.

As best seen in FIG. **8A**, independent shoe **622** includes a load transfer surface **622a**, an upper clamp plate **622b** and a lower clamp plate **622c**. Load transfer surface **622a** has an arcuate profile such as a circular arc profile or an elliptical

arc profile. The arcuate profile of load transfer surface **622a** of independent shoe **622** matches the arcuate profile of load transfer surface **604a** of inboard pocket **604** to form a centrifugal force load path therebetween. Load transfer surface **622a** of independent shoe **622** may be bonded, adhered or otherwise secured to load transfer surface **604a** of inboard pocket **604**. Alternatively or additionally, one or more shoe bolts **624** may pass through aligned shoe bolt openings of upper clamp plate **622b**, yoke **602** and lower clamp plate **622c** to form a clamped relationship between independent shoe **622** and yoke **602** outboard of inboard pocket **604**. The bonded relationship and/or the clamped relationship between independent shoe **622** and yoke **602** prevents relative movement therebetween to maintain the contact relationship and centrifugal force load path therebetween.

The coupling between independent shoe **622** and centrifugal force bearing **616** preferably serves three important functions including providing a centrifugal force load path function, a lateral movement constraint function and an anti-rotation function. During rotary operations of an aircraft using proprotor system **600**, the centrifugal force load generated by each proprotor blade is transferred to yoke **620** by bearing assembly **614**. Within each bearing assembly **614**, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surfaces **616a**, **616b** of centrifugal force bearing **616** and mating surfaces **622d**, **622e** of independent shoe **622**. In the illustrated embodiment, mating surface **616a** is a generally conical mating surface and mating surface **616b** is a generally planar mating surface. Likewise, mating surface **622d** is a generally conical mating surface and mating surface **622e** is a generally planar mating surface. As illustrated, mating surface **616a** of centrifugal force bearing **616** has a contact relationship with corresponding mating surface **622d** of independent shoe **622**. As best seen in FIG. **8B**, mating surface **616b** of centrifugal force bearing **616** has a spaced apart relationship with corresponding mating surface **622e** of independent shoe **622**. Thus, during rotary operations of an aircraft using proprotor system **600**, the centrifugal force load path includes mating surface **616a** of centrifugal force bearing **616** and mating surface **622d** of independent shoe **622**.

In addition to the centrifugal forces that are generally in the radially outward direction relative to yoke **602**, the components of bearing assembly **614** also experience lateral forces associated with, for example, lead-lag and/or flapping motions of a proprotor blade. Such lateral forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing **616** out of concentricity with independent shoe **622**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **616** includes a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as boss **616c** that extends radially outwardly. Boss **616c** is operably associated with and received within a lateral movement constraint feature depicted as cavity **622f** of independent shoe **622** that extends radially outwardly. As illustrated, boss **616c** and cavity **622f** are each non-cylindrical features depicted as multisided geometric prism features in the form of four-sided geometric prism features. Preferably, boss **616c** and cavity **622f** have a close fitting relationship that prevents and/or substantially prevents relative lateral movement between centrifugal force bearing **616** and independent shoe **622** during rotary operations.

In addition to the centrifugal forces and lateral forces, the components of bearing assembly **614** also experience torsional forces associated with, for example, pitch change operations of a proprotor blade. Such torsional forces may tend to urge centrifugal force bearing **616** to rotate relative

to independent shoe **622**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **616** includes an anti-rotation feature depicted as boss **616c** that extends radially outwardly. Boss **616c** corresponds with and is received within an anti-rotation feature depicted as cavity **622f** of independent shoe **622** that extends radially outwardly. As illustrated, boss **616c** and cavity **622f** are each non-cylindrical features depicted as multisided geometric prism features in the form of four-sided geometric prism features. Preferably, boss **616c** and cavity **622f** have a close fitting relationship that prevents and/or substantially prevents relative rotation between centrifugal force bearing **616** and independent shoe **622** during rotary operations.

An alternate configuration of the coupling between independent shoe **622** and centrifugal force bearing **616** is depicted in FIG. **8C**. In this configuration, the centrifugal force load path includes generally planar mating surface **616d** of centrifugal force bearing **616** and generally planar mating surface **622g** of independent shoe **622**. A plurality of pins depicted as four screws **630** (only two being visible in the drawing) extend between independent shoe **622** and centrifugal force bearing **616** to prevent and/or substantially prevents relative lateral movement and relative rotation between centrifugal force bearing **616** and independent shoe **622**.

Referring next to FIGS. **9A-9D** in the drawings, therein are depicted various views of a proprotor system **700** of the present disclosure. Proprotor system **700** includes a yoke **702** depicted as having three blade arms each including an inboard pocket **704** with an outboard surface **704a**, a pair of hub bolt openings **706** each having a bushing **708** secured therein and four shoe bolt openings **710** each having a bushing **712** secured therein. A bearing assembly **714** is disposed in each of the inboard pockets **704** of yoke **702**, for clarity of illustration, only one such bearing assembly **714** is shown in FIGS. **9A-9D**. Bearing assembly **714** includes a centrifugal force bearing **716**, a shear bearing **718** and an inboard beam **720**. In the illustrated embodiment, shear bearing **718** includes a metal bearing ring **718a** that is preferably permanently coupled to an elastomer element of shear bearing **718** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material to the inner surface of bearing ring **718a**. Bearing ring **718a** includes an upper clamp plate **718b** that is coupled to a lower clamp plate **718c** by bearing bolts **722a**, **722b**. Upper and lower clamp plates **718b**, **718c** are coupled to yoke **702** by hub bolts **724a**, **724b**. As described above, hub bolts **724a**, **724b** have been foreshortened for convenience of illustration as hub bolts **724a**, **724b** would also coupled the constant velocity joint to yoke **702**.

Centrifugal force bearing **716** has an integral shoe **726** having an outboard surface **726a** and an upper clamp plate **726b**. An independent lower clamp plate **726c** is coupled to integral shoe **726** by bolts **728** or other suitable connectors. In the illustrated embodiment, a plurality of shoe bolts **730** pass through aligned shoe bolt openings of upper clamp plate **726b**, yoke **702** and lower clamp plate **726c** to form a clamped relationship between integral shoe **726** and yoke **702** outboard of inboard pocket **704** wherein upper clamp plate **726b** may have a contact relationship with an upper surface of yoke **702** and lower clamp plate **726c** may have a contact relationship with a lower surface of yoke **702**. Importantly, shoe bolt openings **710** are positioned and sized such that outboard surface **726a** of integral shoe **726** and outboard surface **704a** of inboard pocket **704** have a space apart relationship, as indicated by arrows **732**, when upper and lower clamp plate **726b**, **726c** have the clamped rela-

tionship with yoke **702**. The space apart relationship prevents centrifugal force load transfer between outboard surface **726a** of integral shoe **726** and outboard surface **704a** of inboard pocket **704**. Instead, shoe bolts **730** provide centrifugal force load paths between bearing assembly **714** and yoke **702**. Even though a particular number of shoe bolts **730** have been depicted and described as maintaining the space apart relationship between outboard surface **726a** of integral shoe **726** and outboard surface **704a** of inboard pocket **704** and as providing the centrifugal force load paths between bearing assembly **714** and yoke **702**, it should be understood by those having ordinary skill in the art that the number of shoe bolts could be either less than or greater than four including two shoe bolts, three shoe bolts, five shoe bolts or more.

Referring next to FIGS. **10A-10D** in the drawings, therein are depicted various views of a proprotor system **800** of the present disclosure. Proprotor system **800** includes a yoke **802** depicted as having three blade arms each including an inboard pocket **804** and a pair of hub bolt openings **806** inboard of inboard pocket **804** each having a bushing **808** secured therein. A bearing assembly **810** is disposed in each of the inboard pockets **804** of yoke **802**, for clarity of illustration, only one such bearing assembly **810** is shown in FIGS. **10A-10C**. Bearing assembly **810** includes a centrifugal force bearing **812**, a shear bearing **814**, an inboard beam **816** and a bearing cage **818**. In the illustrated embodiment, shear bearing **814** includes an integral bearing ring **814a** that is preferably permanently coupled to an elastomer element of shear bearing **814** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material to the inner surface of integral bearing ring **814a**.

In the illustrated embodiment, bearing cage **818** includes upper clamp plate **818a**, bearing ring **818b**, bearing retainer **818c** and lower clamp plate **818d**. Integral bearing ring **814a** of shear bearing **814** is coupled to bearing ring **818b** of bearing cage **818** by a pair of bolts **820a**, **820b**. An inboard surface of bearing retainer **818c** is preferably permanently coupled to an elastomer bearing element **812a** of centrifugal force bearing **812** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material to bearing retainer **818c**. In the illustrated embodiment, centrifugal force bearing **812** is disposed within bearing retainer **818c**. Upper clamp plate **818a** and a lower clamp plate **818d** are coupled together by bearing bolts **822a**, **822b**. Upper and lower clamp plates **818a**, **818d** are coupled to yoke **802** by hub bolts **824a**, **824b**. As described above, hub bolts **824a**, **824b** have been foreshortened for convenience of illustration as hub bolts **824a**, **824b** would also coupled the constant velocity joint to yoke **802**. Importantly, an outboard surface **818e** of bearing retainer **818c** has a space apart relationship with an outboard surface **804a** of inboard pocket **804** when upper and lower clamp plate **818a**, **818d** have the clamped relationship with yoke **802**. The space apart relationship prevents centrifugal force load transfer between outboard surface **818e** of bearing retainer **818c** and outboard surface **804a** of inboard pocket **804**. Instead, hub bolts **824a**, **824b** provide centrifugal force load paths between bearing assembly **810** and yoke **802**.

Referring next to FIGS. **11A-11B** in the drawings, therein is depicted various a proprotor system **900** of the present disclosure. Proprotor system **900** includes a yoke **902** depicted as having an inboard pocket **904** and a pair of hub bolt openings (not visible) inboard of inboard pocket **904** each having a bushing secured therein. A bearing assembly **910** is disposed in inboard pocket **904** of yoke **902**. Bearing assembly **910** includes a centrifugal force bearing **912**, a

shear bearing **914**, an inboard beam **916** and a bearing cage **918**. In the illustrated embodiment, inboard beam **916** includes a cavity **916a** that is preferably permanently coupled to an elastomer element of shear bearing **914** by vulcanizing, bonding, adhering or otherwise securing the elastomeric material to the inner surface of cavity **916a**.

In the illustrated embodiment, bearing cage **918** includes upper clamp plate **918a**, spindle **918b**, bearing retainer **918c** and lower clamp plate **918d**. Bearing retainer **918c** has an anti-rotation coupling with centrifugal force bearing **912**. In the illustrated embodiment, screws **920** extend between bearing retainer **918c** and an outboard metal housing **912a** of centrifugal force bearing **912** to prevent relative rotation and lateral movements therebetween. In the illustrated embodiment, spindle **918b** passes through and is operable to allow relative rotation thereabout by centrifugal force bearing **912** and shear bearing **914**. Upper clamp plate **918a** and a lower clamp plate **918d** are coupled together by bearing bolts **922a**, **922b**. Upper and lower clamp plates **918a**, **918b** are coupled to yoke **902** by hub bolts **924a**, **924b**. As described above, hub bolts **924a**, **924b** have been foreshortened for convenience of illustration as hub bolts **924a**, **924b** would also coupled the constant velocity joint to yoke **902**. Importantly, an outboard surface **918e** of bearing retainer **918c** has a space apart relationship with an outboard surface **904a** of inboard pocket **904** when upper and lower clamp plate **918a**, **918b** have the clamped relationship with yoke **902**. The space apart relationship prevents centrifugal force load transfer between outboard surface **918e** of bearing retainer **918c** and outboard surface **904a** of inboard pocket **904**. Instead, hub bolts **924a**, **924b** provide centrifugal force load paths between bearing assembly **910** and yoke **902**.

The foregoing description of embodiments of the disclosure has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the disclosure to the precise form disclosed, and modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings or may be acquired from practice of the disclosure. The embodiments were chosen and described in order to explain the principals of the disclosure and its practical application to enable one skilled in the art to utilize the disclosure in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. Other substitutions, modifications, changes and omissions may be made in the design, operating conditions and arrangement of the embodiments without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. Such modifications and combinations of the illustrative embodiments as well as other embodiments will be apparent to persons skilled in the art upon reference to the description. It is, therefore, intended that the appended claims encompass any such modifications or embodiments.

What is claimed is:

1. A proprotor system for a tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter flight mode and an airplane flight mode, the proprotor system comprising:

- a yoke having a plurality of blade arms including a first blade arm having an inboard pocket;
- a bearing assembly disposed at least partially within the inboard pocket, the bearing assembly including a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing;
- an inboard beam disposed at least partially between the centrifugal force bearing and the shear bearing;
- a proprotor blade coupled to the inboard beam; and
- a latch assembly selectively coupling the bearing assembly to the yoke, the latch assembly rotatable relative to the yoke between engaged and disengaged positions;

wherein, in the engaged position, the latch assembly is engaged with the bearing assembly to couple the bearing assembly to the yoke; and

wherein, in the disengaged position, the latch assembly is disengaged from the bearing assembly enabling installation and removal of the bearing assembly relative to the inboard pocket.

2. The proprotor system as recited in claim **1** wherein the yoke further comprises first and second surfaces and wherein the first blade arm defines a pair of hub bolt openings passing through the yoke inboard of the inboard pocket.

3. The proprotor system as recited in claim **2** further comprising a flange coupled to the shear bearing and having a pair of bearing bolt openings, the flange having a contact relationship with the first surface of the yoke.

4. The proprotor system as recited in claim **3** wherein the latch assembly further comprises a clamp plate coupled to the second surface of the yoke and a pair of cam latches each coupled to and rotatable relative to the first surface of the yoke.

5. The proprotor system as recited in claim **4** wherein, in the engaged position, each cam latch and the clamp plate is coupled to the flange.

6. The proprotor system as recited in claim **4** wherein the clamp plate has a pair of hub bolt openings and a pair of bearing bolt openings, wherein the flange has a pair of bearing bolt openings and wherein each cam latch has a hub bolt opening and a bearing bolt opening.

7. The proprotor system as recited in claim **6** further comprising first and second hub bolts each passing through aligned hub bolt openings of one of the cam latches, the yoke and the clamp plate to couple the latch assembly to the yoke.

8. The proprotor system as recited in claim **7** wherein each cam latch is rotatable about one of the hub bolts between the engaged and disengaged positions enabling, in the disengaged position, installation and removal of the bearing assembly relative to the inboard pocket without removal of the hub bolts.

9. The proprotor system as recited in claim **6** further comprising first and second bearing bolts each passing through aligned bearing bolt openings of one of the cam latches, the flange and the clamp plate to couple the bearing assembly to the yoke when the latch assembly is in the engaged position.

10. The proprotor system as recited in claim **1** wherein, the centrifugal force bearing is positioned outboard of the shear bearing.

11. The proprotor system as recited in claim **1** wherein, the centrifugal force bearing further comprises a series of spherical elastomeric layers separated by inelastic shims.

12. The proprotor system as recited in claim **1** wherein, the shear bearing further comprises:

- a radially inwardly disposed journal bearing coupled to the inboard beam; and
- a radially outwardly disposed spherical bearing providing a tilting degree of freedom for the inboard beam relative to the yoke.

13. The proprotor system as recited in claim **1** wherein the plurality of blade arms further comprises at least three blade arms.

14. A proprotor system for a tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter flight mode and an airplane flight mode, the proprotor system comprising:

- a yoke having a plurality of blade arms including a first blade arm having an inboard pocket;

21

first and second of hub bolts extending through the yoke inboard of the inboard pocket;

a bearing assembly disposed at least partially within the inboard pocket, the bearing assembly including a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing having a flange;

an inboard beam disposed at least partially between the centrifugal force bearing and the shear bearing;

a proprotor blade coupled to the inboard beam; and

a latch assembly including a clamp plate coupled to a first side of the yoke and a pair of cam latches coupled to a second side yoke by the first and second hub bolts, each cam latch selectively rotatable relative to the yoke about one of the hub bolts between engaged and disengaged positions;

wherein, in the engaged position, each cam latch is coupled to the flange of the shear bearing and the clamp plate to couple the bearing assembly to the yoke; and

wherein, in the disengaged position, each cam latch is uncoupled from the flange enabling installation and removal of the bearing assembly relative to the inboard pocket without removal of the first and second hub bolts.

15. The proprotor system as recited in claim 14 wherein the clamp plate has a pair of hub bolt openings and a pair of bearing bolt openings, wherein the flange has a pair of bearing bolt openings and wherein each cam latch has a hub bolt opening and a bearing bolt opening.

16. The proprotor system as recited in claim 15 wherein each of the hub bolts pass through aligned hub bolt openings of one of the cam latches, the yoke and the clamp plate to couple the latch assembly to the yoke.

17. The proprotor system as recited in claim 16 further comprising first and second bearing bolts each passing through aligned bearing bolt openings of one of the cam latches, the flange and the clamp plate to couple the bearing assembly to the yoke when the latch assembly is in the engaged position.

22

18. The proprotor system as recited in claim 14 wherein, the centrifugal force bearing is positioned outboard of the shear bearing.

19. The proprotor system as recited in claim 14 wherein, the centrifugal force bearing further comprises a series of spherical elastomeric layers separated by inelastic shims and the shear bearing further comprises a radially inwardly disposed journal bearing coupled to the inboard beam and a radially outwardly disposed spherical bearing providing a tilting degree of freedom for the inboard beam relative to the yoke.

20. A tiltrotor aircraft having a helicopter flight mode and an airplane flight mode, the tiltrotor aircraft comprising:

a fuselage;

a wing extending from the fuselage;

first and second pylon assemblies coupled to the wing outboard of the fuselage; and

first and second proprotor systems operably associated respectively with the first and second pylon assemblies, each proprotor system including:

a yoke having a plurality of blade arms including a first blade arm having an inboard pocket;

a bearing assembly disposed at least partially within the inboard pocket, the bearing assembly including a centrifugal force bearing and a shear bearing;

an inboard beam disposed at least partially between the centrifugal force bearing and the shear bearing;

a proprotor blade coupled to the inboard beam; and

a latch assembly selectively coupling the bearing assembly to the yoke, the latch assembly rotatable relative to the yoke between engaged and disengaged positions;

wherein, in the engaged position, the latch assembly is engaged with the bearing assembly to couple the bearing assembly to the yoke; and

wherein, in the disengaged position, the latch assembly is disengaged from the bearing assembly enabling installation and removal of the bearing assembly relative to the inboard pocket.

* * * * *